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# ANTIQUES IN YOUR HOME









The Author

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# ANTIQUES IN YOUR HOME

*A Book for the Small Collector  
of English Antiques*

*by*  
GIL THOMAS



© Gil Thomas 1957, *First Edition*  
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*For*  
MY WIFE,  
*my luckiest find.*

The author is grateful to the editor of *Good Housekeeping* magazine for permission to include some material which appeared in the feature series called "Antique Adventures."



## FOREWORD

**H**IS book will have little interest for the expert or the connoisseur, whose requirements are well served by the multitude of standard works on the fine arts. But I hope it may appeal to people like myself with small means and a great longing to possess things which are rare and beautiful.

It is not a text-book—it is much more a personal narrative of my own adventures in search of knowledge and of the small collection of antiques I now have in my home. Nothing I own is ever likely to cause a furor at a major antique dealer's, but I would not willingly part with any of my treasures. In collecting them I have spent many happy hours in company with my wife. I have had the usual wild and improbable dreams of making my fortune through the acquisition of some object of priceless rarity. That moment may yet come, and if it does I am well prepared for it.

Most of the factual information is presented in relation to the forming of my collection. And I hope it will help and encourage others to acquire things which will give them lasting pleasure.

G. T.

LANGTON MATRAVERS



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## BRITISH MONEY VALUES

1 guinea = \$2.94

1 pound (£) or sovereign = \$2.80

1 crown = 70 cents

1 shilling = 14 cents

12 pence = 14 cents

e.g., three and six = three shillings and sixpence



## CHAPTER ONE

### MY INTRODUCTION TO ANTIQUES

IF there is permanence anywhere in the universe I suppose it is to be found in the wealth of art treasures left to us by past civilizations. In the books, paintings, ceramic ware and architecture of bygone artists and craftsmen we find a standard by which to judge those of the present age. Every period of art owes something to its predecessors. Even the twentieth century, which is mainly notable for its shoddy mass-produced gadgets, may yet produce something worthy to rank with the masterpieces of the past.

In the field of antiques there are always two opposing forces. On the one hand the art lovers—those persons who have a feeling for rare and beautiful objects and who like to possess them for their own sake and not for their intrinsic value. On the other hand there are those who trade in antiques—who, while contributing nothing to their production, see in the artist and craftsman merely a means of making money and of creating artificial values.

Sometimes by some mysterious alchemy the opposites combine and the dealer becomes not only an art lover but a patron. Indeed, many a collector owes his knowledge and his collection to the help he has received from friends in the trade. And between these two groups lies a third, consisting of the fortunate possessors of inherited treasures who, often through lack of

knowledge, are in danger of losing them to the person with a nose for a bargain and a wallet full of notes. With the coming of the automobile the dealers foraged through the countryside of England, stripping homes and cottages of their treasures, paying in many cases absurd prices for goods worth hundreds of pounds. Many a householder has been happy to sell a worm-eaten old table for a pound or two and to throw in "that old dish" with it. The old dish was often a Chelsea cauliflower tureen and the "funny old jug" hidden away in the corner a Ralph Wood toby. It is true that we all like to buy cheaply; it is human nature to want to find a bargain and this always has to be done at someone's expense. And there is something to be said for the dealer's viewpoint, too. Folk who are ignorant of the beauty and value of their possessions have no right to own them merely to let them moulder away in damp cupboards or get smashed by romping children. Better for them to have the dealer's pound or two and let the rare old dish find its way eventually into the collector's cabinet where it deserves to be housed.

My object in writing this book is to try and help some of my readers to follow my example and make a small collection of *objets d'art* in a manner within their means, which may well in present times be extremely modest. Either as an investment or as a source of æsthetic pleasure and interest, such a collection is always a joy to own.

There has to be a beginning, of course. One does not suddenly become an expert on any subject. I am by no means an expert myself. I am an amateur, I know a little and I am always learning. Like Reggie Fortune, H. C. Bailey's detective, who had a feeling for people, I have a feeling for things and I often know instinctively whether an article is good or bad.

Although my wife and I owned one or two treasures which had belonged to her family I did not take any serious interest in antiques until after the war. I had always worked hard and had little time for anything much except reading. Books were my main interest in life up to that time.

In the summer of 1946 I found to my great regret that my very active life had to be curtailed. Years of trying work in a Service Ministry in London throughout the blitz, flying bombs and rockets, combined with fire-watching and service with the Home Guard, had produced a kind of mental fatigue which necessitated a long rest. I had tried the palliative of short

holidays here and there, but the trouble was too serious to be cured by a normal vacation. In short, I was thoroughly worn out and needed a good long break if I was ever going to be any good again. So I resigned my job with its attractive salary and prospects of advancement to the higher echelons of the Civil Service—I was a specialist in public relations work—and my wife and I considered our next move.

The obvious solution was to try to rent a cheap cottage in an isolated part of the country, preferably near the sea. We decided to explore the villages within easy reach of Swanage, in Dorset, and after a long search we found a place at Worth Matravers. It was by no means ideal. Indeed it was more like a shack, small, inconvenient, with no water or sewerage, but it had the great advantage of being near the sea and within easy walking distance of one of the loveliest coastlines in the whole of England. Augustus John had made the village his summer headquarters for many years, and the late Leslie Banks owned a cottage almost opposite us, and spent as much time as he could there with his charming wife and family.

We regarded our shack for what it was—a kind of trailer without wheels which would enable us to live very cheaply in ideal surroundings. We threw out the hideous bits of furniture it contained and installed a bed-settee, two comfortable chairs and various odds and ends of household equipment. Water had to be fetched from the village pump. The edifice which housed the outdoor sanitation provided a grandstand view through its rotting boards of the congregation going to church on Sunday.

No matter. We were very lucky. We had one priceless asset, the prospect of a whole long summer before us; for we could stay as long as our money held out. My wife, the writer professionally known by her maiden name of Nina Warner Hooke, would also have time and opportunity for her work.

We settled down happily. The summer of 1947 was really wonderful and we quickly acquired the gipsy-like tan which comes from regular sun- and sea-bathing and that feeling of well-being which springs from having nothing much to do and all the time in the world in which to do it.

Gradually we became absorbed into the life of the village. In the early days of our residence there we were probably regarded as being somewhat eccentric. Our shack had long been the home of a succession of oddities, including one woman

who used to rush out at the village children and throw bowls of water over them. It had also housed two nieces of Sir Stafford Cripps. It was known derisively as "The Pig and Whistle," or sometimes "Windsor Castle."

Farther down the village street, opposite the pond, was an ancient stone-built cottage. It housed a retired sea captain who had dabbled in antiquarian book-selling, and his sister, both very old and very ill. One day we heard that the sister was dead, and in fact had been lying in the cottage for some days before her death was discovered and the remains removed. Not long afterwards the captain himself departed for a celestial harbor and before much time had elapsed "For Sale" boards appeared outside the cottage, together with a bill announcing a forthcoming auction sale of the contents.

We learned via the village grape-vine that the house was to be sold for the benefit of church funds and the money from the sale of the contents was to be paid as a legacy to a local woman who had worked as housekeeper at the cottage for many years.

The village postmaster was one of the executors of the will and one day he spoke to me in the shop and asked if I would have a look at the books and give him some idea of their value—"You being a writer, you see," he added. My wife and I were delighted at the idea of being allowed into the cottage whose picturesque exterior had always fascinated us. So the next morning, armed with a note-book and a pencil, we walked down the street to begin our task.

We had been told that there were not many books—just a few in a bookcase and some others lying about. But this was one of those classic understatements. There were books everywhere—on shelves, under beds, in boxes which had never been unpacked, even in outhouses, where rats and mice had gnawed through the wrappings and nested in the books themselves. Many of the volumes were damp and mildewed, as were most of the contents of the cottage, which appeared to have had little light and air admitted into its dark interior for almost the whole period of the captain's residence.

We soon realized that ours was an impossible task under the circumstances. We could scarcely see to read the titles, nor had we room to move. Fresh piles of books were continually dumped at our side until we seemed to be drowning in a sea of literature.

There was only one thing to be done and that was to get the whole lot removed to somewhere where there was space and light. So we enlisted the aid of one or two able-bodied villagers as carriers and spread out the whole collection on trestles in an outhouse attached to the post office, to air and dry out before we began the task of inspecting and valuing.

Nina, meanwhile, had become friendly with the dear old lady who was the legatee. This good soul, far from being overjoyed by her good fortune, was absolutely mortified. It appeared to her to be in the nature of a calamity and she wandered round in a daze, picking things up and putting them down and giving vent from time to time to heavy sighs and wails of "Oh, deary me, whatever will I do with it all?" We offered to help her in her task of going through the household contents and getting things ready for the auctioneer. Had we known the magnitude of our task we should probably have had second thoughts. Every conceivable kind of junk had been hoarded for over forty years. Goods had been ordered by mail and the bales and boxes never opened. Coal sheds and outhouses were stuffed to the roof with all manner of containers from filthy old trunks to rusty biscuit tins. Silver and silver plate were found packed away in newspapers dating from the turn of the century. Whole tea and dinner services emerged from their rotting prisons, most of them never having been used.

One of the results of our labors was the building of an enormous bonfire in the garden for the consumption of all the rotten newspapers, wrappings, boxes and mildewed fabrics, and if the old housekeeper had had her way the whole contents of the cottage would have gone on it. Nina caught her staggering down to the fire one day with what looked like a bundle of rags.

"What have you got there?" she asked.

"Nothing, dearie, just a few more old rags."

"Let me have a look," urged my wife.

Somewhat gingerly the bundle was unrolled and out of its folds emerged a beautiful patchwork quilt—at least a hundred years old.

"You're surely not going to burn that?" said my wife.

"Oh, I don't want it. Rubbishy old thing. You have it, dearie, if you want it."

I think the old lady was so grateful for our help that she

would have given us anything ; but anyway, we bought it and vowed to keep a watchful eye open in case any more such treasures were condemned to the flames.

My own discovery, and one which was really the beginning of my interest in antiques, was a piece of china. One of our helpers dug out from among the rusty tins and baking pans a dirty object which might have been anything. It was covered in cobwebs and the interior was full of rat droppings. It was going straight into the dustbin when I called out, "Wait a minute—let me have a look at that." Having examined it, I asked if I might buy it.

I had acted for no other reason than an instinctive "hunch." The article had been quite unrecognizable. It certainly had two handles and appeared to be a piece of china but that was all I could see at the time. But when I had washed it in several relays of soapy water and scrubbed off the accumulated grime of years there emerged a most handsome loving-cup, beautifully decorated with transfer-printed hunting scenes of the Regency period. I still have it. It was my first find and I will never sell it, although I have had many offers.

The result of almost a week's labor found us weary but triumphant. The books had been sorted and an inventory made. There was not much of any value ; the captain had evidently bought books in bundles without much regard for literary or intrinsic worth. But there were some fairly good sets of classics, a few collections of plays and a great deal of miscellaneous and haphazard reading which included religious works and ancient volumes of sermons. The whole lot went to a book dealer for some forty pounds. They would have fetched more money but for the bad condition of most of them.

So far as the contents of the cottage were concerned my knowledge at that time was insufficient to enable me to recognize anything of real value. All I had was a "feeling" for things. But there was one article which even my limited knowledge told me was a fine piece of furniture. I had, however, no idea at all of its value. It was a Queen Anne bureau tucked away in an upstairs bedroom. It was dirty, wormy and needed much repairing and polishing. I made, on behalf of a friend, what I considered a most extravagant offer of fifty pounds to the executor, but he was unable to accept it as all the furniture had to be sold by public auction. He thanked me very kindly and

said that in all probability I should get it for much less money at the sale as the buyer would have to spend quite a bit in repairs. It was fortunate for the owner that my offer was not accepted. The piece fetched over three hundred pounds. And there was a very amusing sequel. The local dealers had made a ring, and I presume their intention was to buy all they could for as little money as possible and "knock it out" among themselves afterwards, as is customary in this illegal but universal practice. One of the dealers, however, didn't play the game. He was so determined to have the bureau that he broke out of the ring, paying a reasonable price for it, thus doing his associates out of "a day's wages" and calling down on his unrepentant head various unsavoury epithets. I was told afterwards that the incident almost culminated in a free fight, which pleased me enormously. Later on I shall have more to say about salesrooms, dealers and the "ring."

Looking back in the light of later knowledge I know now that there were many things in that sale which I should have bought and which I should now like to own. One jug, in particular. I can still see it in my mind's eye, standing on the mantelpiece of the old cottage. It was rather dirty and of a curious off-white color which then seemed to me to be quite uninteresting. But it was in fact a rare piece of eighteenth-century salt-glaze, which is very hard to come by today except at a high price.

We did make one good purchase, however, which was a lucky speculation. Leading off the living-room of the cottage was a dark and dirty cellar. Packed away in its dim recesses were a number of bottles with no labels and no indication whatever of their contents. Sampling was forbidden. For all anyone knew, they might have contained nothing but soured old wine. But shortly before the sale a bottle disappeared and one of the villagers became blissfully and uproariously drunk. Now a hard-headed Dorset character isn't likely to be affected like this by sour wine—he wouldn't drink it in the first place, for it would be nothing but vinegar. There was another significant clue, too. In an outhouse we had come upon an old stoneware five-gallon jar of the type in which spirits used to be imported many years ago. This, combined with the identity of the late owner, an ex-sea captain, prompted us to put two and two together and take the plunge. We offered twenty-five pounds

for contents of cellar, which was accepted. We removed the collection which we stored in our shack until our return to London. In September, we packed the bottles in cartons in the back of our ancient car and arrived safely in St. John's Wood without any breakages.

Then came the task of re-bottling and identification. All the bottles had to be strained, as most of the corks had rotted and our flat smelt like a distillery by the time we had finished. But we had done well. We had five bottles of superb old brandy, eight of magnificent liqueur whisky, and about twelve bottles of a fine dry Spanish sherry. There *were* some bottles of wine which had turned to vinegar and which we threw away, and one bottle of Cointreau.

This was a time when liquor of all kinds was difficult to obtain—especially spirits. Neither my wife nor I drink very much and we decided to keep our hoard until Christmas and then sell it. Early in December we advertised it privately and I am rather ashamed to say now that we were paid eight pounds a bottle for the brandy, three pounds ten for the whisky and thirty shillings per bottle for the sherry—and our customers came begging for more. So our investment paid off very handsomely.

The ensuing winter was that of the great freeze-up, when the main road leading from Baker Street to St. John's Wood was a rutted ice track and was lined with cars with broken rear axles. I had no work except a commission to write a book about detective fiction, and I spent much of my time in the study of antiques—particularly pottery and porcelain. I got to know the local dealers, some of whom were very kind indeed to me—a customer who rarely bought anything but was always popping in and nosing around and asking questions. For one thing I had very little money to spend and for another, like most beginners, I wanted to buy everything, my eyes at last being opened to the beauty of form and decoration of antique porcelain. But we made ourselves afford an early Spode breakfast service, with a dragon pattern. Years of utility china and thick white cups had made us long for something delicate and fragile out of which to drink our morning tea. The family heirlooms which were thought to be safely stowed away in a safe-deposit vault had fallen an early victim to a large bomb.

After much study I became interested in the work of the

eighteenth-century potters—Astbury, Whieldon and Ralph Wood in particular. Nina and I on our walks around Hampstead and adjacent localities used to dream hopefully about finding an unidentified Ralph Wood toby jug, an Astbury horse or a Whieldon figure in a junk shop. It was, of course, rather like looking for water in the Sahara desert.

There was a time when such finds were possible and, of course, there must still be much that is fine and old hidden away in cabinets and attics. I myself know one country mansion which is a veritable treasure house and whose owners seem to take only a casual interest in the things they own. They seemed unaware, for instance, that a double Derby dinner service of a most unusual pattern and with a very early mark was anything out of the ordinary. It had been in the family possession for so long that it had become, to them, quite unimportant. My friends were astonished when I told them that it was valuable and very rare. One day, purely for my own selfish pleasure, I am going to go through that house with a fine toothcomb and examine everything in it.

Much of our English heritage of antiques has crossed the water and the collector in England has now, more than ever, to rely upon the dealers and the large auction rooms for the pieces he requires. If you have enough money you can buy anything. But to my way of thinking the fun of collecting is in finding your own items, buying them cheaply and backing your own judgment against that of the experts. Your piece, when you have got it, is worth much more to you than if you had casually written a large cheque for it.

One day my wife came home in great excitement. She had been to Camden Town where she used to shop sometimes in the market. On her way back up Park Way she had seen in a junk shop a figure which had attracted her attention. It was priced at twenty-five shillings, but she had not bought it because she had felt we could not afford even this modest sum merely to indulge our new hobby. From her description it seemed that it might be a Whieldon piece. So we decided to buy it. She went back and was successful in getting it for a pound. When we examined it thoroughly it looked as if her hunch had been right.

It was a figure of a gardener, about nine inches high, in eighteenth-century costume, with a basket on his back. It was

of pottery, with a beautiful thick glaze which had run in typical fashion. The basket was slightly damaged but otherwise the piece was in good condition.

Now we had to get our hopes verified. We took it along to a local dealer who was unable to help. But as we were leaving the shop he said, "Wait a moment. There's a gentleman just calling who has a shop in Bond Street. I'm pretty sure he'll know what it is." The Bond Street dealer took one look at our little figure, pushed it to one side and said in a voice filled with scorn, "Victorian rubbish."

We were much downcast over this. But we decided to get another opinion and this time my wife took it to one of the greatest experts on the ware. This old gentleman, who was most courteous and kind, was very interested. He thought at first that our guess was right—then after much deliberation decided that it was in all probability an early Wedgwood figure. As a point of interest, Josiah Wedgwood was first a pupil and then a partner of Thomas Whieldon and there was a transitory period of manufacture when the products might have been the work of either master or pupil. Whieldon ware was very seldom marked—neither was that of Wedgwood until he began work at his own factory using his first impressed mark. During this transitory period I believe that Wedgwood invented the fine green glaze which is so characteristic of his early wares. So there was a distinct possibility that our figure was either Whieldon or early Wedgwood.

As a further check my wife took our figure to a famous London salesroom. Here also they showed interest and offered to sell it, first of all advising us on a bottom price. But we decided to keep it and make it the first item in a collection of eighteenth-century pottery. The real origin of the figure is still anyone's guess. I have since taken it to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Even there they can't be sure. But I am more than ever convinced that it does come from the Whieldon factory, possibly dating from the time when old Whieldon was on the verge of retirement and Wedgwood had more or less taken control.

In the spring of 1948 our fortunes changed for the better. I was successful in obtaining a post in the Information Division of the Board of Trade and my wife began to sell her work in the American market. We still retained our shack, using it as

a vacation home. My wife, who hates London, planned to go away at the beginning of May and stay all summer. I would take a day or two's leave to help install her and our car would stagger off from St. John's Wood in the early hours of the morning—we used to start about six o'clock—laden to the roof with all the impedimenta for the summer. After that, the intention was that I should go down to Dorset at week-ends and holidays. Our separation was worth while as my wife used this period to hunt the district for a suitable old cottage which we could convert into a permanent home.

During my "bachelor" periods at the flat I spent a lot of time on the study of old china. I bought for five pounds a third-edition copy of William Chaffers' *Marks and Monograms on Pottery and Porcelain* which, though first written about a hundred years ago, is still a standard work on the subject apart from its intrinsic value as a rare book.

On wet evenings I stayed home with my nose buried in my Chaffers. On fine evenings and at lunch-times I walked around Marylebone, Hampstead, Camden Town, anywhere where antique shops and junk markets were to be found, and gazed and speculated and pondered. I also made some friends among people in the business, notably a woman dealer whose charming little shop stood on the borderline between St. John's Wood and Kilburn and whose patience with an inquisitive amateur was as inexhaustible as her knowledge. She taught me what neither books nor priceless exhibits in museums could do—the actual "feel" of fine porcelain, old brass and old wood. She would place a Chinese vase in my hands and make me stroke it, so as to know the texture of the rich, soft glaze. "Like satin, isn't it?" she would say. And she would show me a pretty table which had been "made up," pointing out which were the original parts and which were the work of clever restorers.

Occasionally I bought something from her but never anything of consequence. I owe much to her kindness, which at first I could not really understand. I realize now that even though she had to trade in them for her living she loved old things for their own sake, not for what they would fetch, and that she was drawn to anyone else who felt as she did. It was she who encouraged me to extend my enthusiasm beyond china and pottery into other fields, and thus laid the groundwork for this book.

When I took my annual vacation that summer a chance came to test my newly acquired knowledge. A big country house sale was billed to take place in the neighborhood of Swanage. It was to be a two-day sale and there was a quantity of fine china as well as pictures, period furniture and silver.

Both my wife and I looked forward to it with some excitement. We hoped to pick up some decorative pieces for our proposed new home in the country, which was just then emerging from a dream into reality.

For both of us it was our first experience of a sale at which the goods we wanted to buy would be non-utilitarian and at which we would be in competition with experts.

I am going to describe in some detail what happened at this sale because it was not only a very lucky one for me but of importance in other ways. It provided the foundation of my present collection, but more important, it gave me confidence in my own enterprise and judgment.

On the view day we felt very far from confident. Many items in the catalogue were printed in heavy black type, which meant that they were of special significance. Dealers from Bournemouth, Southampton and Dorchester were swarming all over the house and it seemed obvious to us that they would grab all the best stuff, leaving the junk and oddments to be fought over by private buyers.

In this depressed view we were, of course, mistaken. While it is true that many of the best pieces do find their way into dealers' vans, there is no real reason why this should be so. Dealers, to my knowledge, will not pay more for an article than it is worth. Indeed, in many cases they pay much less, especially when the "ring" is operating. This malpractice needs abolishing. It is always the poor owner of the property being sold who comes off worst. The fault lies partly in insufficient knowledge on his part and partly because many private buyers feel that if they go to a sale the goods must be almost given away to them. There is absolutely no reason why valuable goods should not fetch their market price at public auctions so long as the public is willing to compete with the dealers. It is obvious that the dealers, who are hard-headed types and not in business for their health, must make a profit on the goods they sell. Thus it follows that if the private buyer is willing to pay the price he would have to pay to the dealer later, he can get the

goods he wants at source. I have heard it argued that because there is no other source of supply than the second-hand market the dealer, because of his specialized knowledge, is entitled to get goods for next to nothing. All I can say in rebuttal of this statement is that no one is entitled to cheat other people out of money that rightly belongs to them, because this is often what happens.

On the other hand the sellers are often very largely to blame. They will not go to the trouble or slight extra expense of employing a licensed valuer to advise them on the value of their belongings and the fixing of suitable bottom prices. The small sum spent in buying professional advice would be amply repaid by the higher prices they would obtain for their goods.

It is not generally known that by paying the requisite fees anybody in England can become an auctioneer. He does not have to know the difference between a Chippendale and a kitchen table. Anyway, there we were, a couple of timid tyros hopefully marking numbers in our catalogues in the pottery and porcelain sections but not really believing that we would get anything worth while.

It was the first day's sale which brought me my grand stroke of luck. Selling took place in the big crowded drawing-room. Most of the fine china was on display there, but not the whole of it. There was a small sitting-room upstairs in which stood a corner cabinet holding a large number of equally good but smaller articles. On view day we had gazed covetously into this cabinet. There were about a dozen finely painted plates, a Capo di Monte vase, a Wedgwood black basalt urn, an antique Venetian glass dragon, numerous exquisite small cups and saucers and many other things, all quite perfect. We had visualized the Wedgwood piece in a niche in our cottage, the cups and saucers in a bijouterie and the lovely plates hanging on our whitewashed walls. For some inexplicable reason the entire contents of the cabinet had been lumped together in one lot and there was no point in guessing what it would fetch. We simply had to wait and see. It came up late in the afternoon. The auctioneer announced, "Lot 310," and the porter brought in, as is customary in the case of multiple lots, a single item—which in this case was the handsome Rhodian vase standing on the top of the cabinet. The bidding crept slowly up to four pounds ten, my own bid, and then stopped. I could hardly believe my ears. The Rhodian vase alone was worth that.

At the end of the sale when I rushed upstairs to gloat over my purchases, a tough-looking dealer, who had been spokesman for the ring, followed me and made several nasty remarks. I realised then what had happened. He had thought he was bidding for the vase only! "That'll teach you to be more careful next time," I said, feeling pretty pleased with myself.

My elation lasted over the second day's sale. I bought one or two other large mixed lots, including part of a Mason's Iron-stone dinner service, and in my cocky mood even began to cast an eye on several pieces that were far beyond my reach. I threw in a casual bid for a pair of Worcester scale-blue vases and then, just for the hell of it, another for a Meissen group. Needless to say I didn't get either of these, which is just as well since large sums were involved. But I was hankering to have another go, and my eye now fell on what I knew—though it was not so described in the catalogue—to be a Leeds mug. It was a collector's item, with the typical twisted handle and floral decoration, and in mint condition. The nasty-looking dealer was now gunning for me and when he saw that I was not to be shaken off he ran me up to five guineas. I had got the bit between my teeth and all the time I was bidding I could feel my wife tugging at my coat trying to stop me.

Afterwards she took me severely to task. I pointed out that the mug was a very fine one and that, after all, we had had a great triumph in getting the contents of the cabinet so cheaply, but she was not appeased.

"You can't afford to spend five pounds on a single piece."

"Well, I've done it," I said.

"Then you must try to sell the mug and get your money back if you can."

"I'll not only get my money back but I'll make a profit on it, you'll see. I did well enough with that liquor we bought, didn't I?"

My wife still looked doubtful, but in the end I proved right. When I went back to London I took the mug to my Hampstead friend. She agreed that it was worth what I paid for it and said that if I would leave it with her she would show it to a man she knew, who had a special interest in Leeds ware, the next time he came into her shop.

He came within a few days and she sold him my mug for seven pounds.

This not only reinstated me in my wife's esteem but it crowned the whole episode of the sale. I had acquired, absurdly cheaply, some delightful things for our new home and I had confirmed my status as a collector by disposing profitably of a piece I did not wish to keep to another collector.

As a footnote to this chapter on the salesroom and other sources it is worth pointing out that the poor quality of much modern household china makes it more than ever worth while to buy good stuff at second-hand. The craftsman of the past used designs and decorations which look just as well in modern homes as they did in contemporary settings. This applies to furniture as well. I am amazed at the numbers of newly married couples who mortgage their income for years ahead because they *must* have a brand-new hideous three-piece suite and the usual dining-room furnishings when, for the expenditure of far less money and no onerous installment plan, they could buy at auction good comfortable armchairs and settees and tables—maybe not "*en suite*" but far more worth having.





## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SALESROOM AND OTHER SOURCES

THE quest for an old piece of furniture or for treasures of a bygone age can take one into all kinds of strange places, from the cloistered seclusion of Sotheby's or Christie's to the junk stall in an out-of-the-way village fête. A different approach is necessary in all cases. In the rarefied atmosphere of the exclusive salesrooms where almost every article sold has a long pedigree the bidding may advance in a dignified silence by hundreds of pounds in a few minutes ; in the country salesroom the auctioneer often has to cajole his customers to bid an extra sixpence for a firescreen and sundries.

It is a mystery where the goods come from which flow into auction rooms week after week, all over the country. But come they do without fail, each single article having its own association with a home—a mute observer, as it were, of the social history of our times. Anyone who shares with me an ardent passion for sale-going can indulge in it to his heart's content. That is, if he has time to spare. It can be a time-wasting pursuit. Generally, attendance at a sale can take anything up to three or four days, or even a week, according to the length of the sale. A day to view, two or three days to buy and a day to clear. The particular thing one wants is nearly always in the middle of the sale, or at the very end, and one often has to sit through weary hours of comparative boredom before the exciting moment when lot four hundred and something is announced from the rostrum.

An auction room has all the fascination of a treasure hunt,

with the greater possibility that there may be a find for you at the end of the sale. The time when true discernment in the appreciation of antiques was confined to an eclectic minority of dealers and antiquarians is long past, and although it is still true that it takes an expert eye to detect the cleverly restored piece of Chippendale or the forged Meissen group, there are a large number of amateur collectors who are able to recognize an article of beauty—which does not always mean that it is valuable. Some of the manufacturers of the past had a prolific output and in addition to their finest goods produced all the furnishings and adornments for the ordinary household.

For instance, it is only quite recently that Staffordshire cottage china has come to have any value. Now, the rather silly looking dogs and stolid equestrian groups have a certain fashion which naturally makes them more expensive to buy. But, as with many pieces of pottery and porcelain which may still be found in profusion, they are not yet in the class of rare and expensive antiques. Their average price has reached a modest peak which is not likely to be exceeded for some years to come.

This is one reason why you will see, all over the country, furniture, porcelain and bric-à-brac which has only a certain value and which moves rather sluggishly from place to place. Each article may have changed hands a dozen or more times and on each occasion a small amount has been added to its selling price until it has reached the ultimate extent of its value. It may stick at that figure for years, until the fashions change, or the owner is prepared to sell it cheaply in order to get rid of it. I know many antique shops in which the goods offered for sale never seem to vary from year to year. They are likely to be in the window till doomsday. They may be priced too high, they may be too big or quite useless except as depositories for dirt and dust, or they may simply be the undistinguished flotsam of the Victorian age—worthy, but dull.

Not long ago I made a tour of the West Country with a friend. We visited every antique and junk shop in about a dozen towns and bought nothing. We could have loaded up our car with enormous meat dishes, ornate Victorian vases, Staffordshire dogs, tea caddies and workboxes minus their interior fittings, brass fenders and fire irons, doubtful oil paintings and water-colors—in fact, a residue of goods which had been combed

over by every dealer in the West Country and which the owners would have been delighted to part with. Generally speaking, the prices asked were high and out of all proportion to the beauty and intrinsic value of the goods. Most of the shopkeepers seemed to act on the assumption that anything old must be valuable. Values of antiques are artificial anyway, governed principally by the law of supply and demand, and when there is no interest it is ridiculous to try and create false values. If you do not want an article there is no point in buying it. But if you want it, then it is worth while taking trouble to find out something of its history and value. I guarantee that if you were to buy, say, a Mason's Ironstone jug at one shop in a town for five pounds and take it immediately to another antique shop and offer to sell it you would be offered, perhaps, thirty shillings to two pounds. You should be able to buy this particular article at a public sale for about the latter figure. That is why, from the point of view of the collector with small means, it is essential to know what you want and where to get it as cheaply as possible.

One's chances of picking up a choice piece among the rubbish at a sale are now much diminished. But they do occur, and whenever a band of auction addicts are gathered together you can hear them proudly swapping yarns of the finds they have made and the others they have missed by a narrow margin.

Usually it is the miscellaneous lots which are most likely to yield a prize—those catalogued as “a box of sundries,” “a bundle of books,” “a pair of vases and other assorted china.” Such lots are generally offered at the beginning or end of a sale and are to be found stowed away in odd corners or pushed under tables. On view days you will find us grubbing like moles behind the wardrobes or on the floor as we rummage through the sundries. An old trunk may contain anything from a pair of binoculars to a sampler with a child's name and the date picked out in faded silk. Or it may be full of newspapers and worn-out boots. But in a battered old trunk a friend of mine, an actor by the name of Tanner, once found an ancient apothecary's chest. It was complete to the last detail—even to the scales and the phials of dried-up drugs and medicines.

Tanner, by the way, owns a half share in a small antique shop in West London and rather fancies himself as a figure in the trade. When he is “resting,” as frequently happens in his

profession, he spends his time both pleasantly and profitably in picking up stuff for his shop, which provides him with a very useful sideline in hard times. He and I indulge in fierce rivalry over our finds, and the atmosphere when we attend sales together is tense. Occasionally we join forces for our mutual profit, but as he will never take my advice, nor I his, we have not yet succeeded in pulling off any world-shaking deal.

Victorian tea caddies, deed boxes, stationery boxes and trinket boxes are all fertile ground for the rummager and it is surprising what these can yield in the way of an unexpected bonus. It may be a pair of jet buckles, a cameo brooch, or even—who knows?—a letter written in a spidery hand on brittle yellow paper and signed “Horatio,” or “Emma.” I know a dealer who habitually buys every locked box, trunk or caddy he can find. Over a period of years this has cost him quite a bit and yielded up an astonishing miscellany of glass marbles, buttons and hairpins. But on the one occasion when his persistence was rewarded he was compensated in ample measure for many disappointments. Inside a small Georgian writing-case he discovered *three* Romney miniatures.

Auction sales are held regularly in most towns and the goods offered come from a variety of sources. Some of them are dealers' unsold wares. It is a good idea to learn the procedure and study the manner in which bids are made and any idiosyncrasies of the auctioneer. It is very instructive to watch the professional bidders and particularly those who do not want their right hand to know what their left is doing. The merest flicker of a catalogue, the twitch of an eyelid, the raising of a finger, a slight jerk of the head will push the bidding along and you have to be very smart indeed to keep up with it. But never be afraid and never be intimidated. Your money is as good as anyone's, and if you do not consider your bid is noticed, speak up and loudly. If you think you have made a proper bid and it has been missed, ask the auctioneer to put the lot up again. No reputable man will refuse to do this if he thinks that a genuine error has been made. On the other hand you cannot expect the auctioneer to have eyes in the back of his head and if you are out of sight you must become audible. There is no point in waving a catalogue in a dark corner of the hall when the auctioneer is looking the other way. Also, do not try to be too clever. And by this I mean sneaking in a bid just when the hammer is

on the point of coming down. I once did this and in consequence I lost a set of books I would have given my eyeteeth for. Admittedly the auctioneer was too quick. But I was too slow. So if you are going to bid, do so and don't dither.

Some auctioneers work very quickly—the fastest I encountered sold about one hundred and fifty lots a minute—but the average is from seventy to one hundred according to the importance of the sale and the extent of the bidding. Some stick closely to the rules with the bids rising by a prescribed amount whenever a certain figure is reached. Others dodge about and will take a rise of sixpence or a pound as it suits them.

There is nothing for a private buyer to be afraid of, so long as he knows what he is doing. It is true that the large auction rooms are the main sources of supply for the dealers, from the Bond Street connoisseur to the itinerant merchant who has a stall or junk shop in a Saturday market. It is equally true that London lots are larger than those in small salesrooms in country towns. For instance, a miscellaneous lot of china, glass or oddments may consist of anything up to a hundred items, and these are usually purchased by the second-hand dealer. Unless you want to be saddled with a lot of rubbish it is better to let these go by. Unless, of course, there is one piece you must have. In this event, buy the lot, take out the piece you want and put the rest back to be sold another time. You may, however, be able to dispose of the remainder to a dealer on the spot, and if you deduct the value of the piece you have taken you can nearly always dispose of the unwanted surplus.

My wife and I, when we were furnishing our home, decided to buy as much as we could in London salesrooms. We were, at the time, a little green and rather wary of the stony-faced dealers we saw shrewdly appraising the goods on view days. But we badly needed some good carpets at a time when floor coverings which were not absolutely threadbare were fetching huge prices. One week the salesroom nearest to us had a consignment of carpets—many of them rolled up and so stacked that it was impossible to open them out for examination. In fact, any attempt to do this was severely discouraged by the porters. There were two lots which took our fancy. One was a roll of thick, golden-brown Axminster of the finest pre-war quality which was then costing about three pounds a yard, and the other was a number of pieces of off-white Wilton. We were

told that most of the carpeting had come from the furnishings of a ship.

The carpet ring was there in force and we did not expect to be able to buy either of these lots at our price. Indeed, common sense warned us not to bid at all, because for all we knew there might have been an enormous hole in the middle of the Axminster and both lots might have been sustenance for colonies of moths for years past. However, we were pretty desperate by this time and we decided to take a chance. We were encouraged in this decision by the fact that the dealers were bidding and they are not noted as a class for throwing their money about. In the face of what, to us, seemed very stiff competition we bought the Axminster for sixteen pounds and the Wilton for six. They were both in beautiful condition and the Axminster when cleaned and remade covered the whole of our living-room which is twenty-six feet by ten. The Wilton made up into four beautiful rugs. At a conservative estimate these carpets would have cost well over a hundred pounds to buy new—even if we could have got the quality. It is true that we were lucky, but the episode does illustrate my point that the private buyer has nothing to fear from the professional.

But it is no use letting your heart run away with your head. Just because you see a large mahogany wardrobe going for a song is no reason why you should bid for it unless you *need* such an article. You might think this an unnecessary observation. But I assure you it is not. I have watched people, normally cautious and sensible, go quite mad as soon as they get into an auction room. They buy fantastic things for which they have no need and no use. After they have bought them they are apt to wonder what got into them. Well plainly, what got into them was sale fever. And a very common ailment it is too, responsible for some sad errors of judgment and much consequent remorse. But there is, unquestionably, something hypnotic about an auction sale. You have only to watch the incredibly stupid behavior of the dupes who frequent mock auction sales and who buy rubbish at high prices to realize that.

Equally to be guarded against is a too casual approach. Under this heading come carelessness, inattention to, or unfamiliarity with, the procedure. Don't nod to an acquaintance across the room or gaily wave your catalogue while bidding is going on. Any such inadvertent gesture may be interpreted by

the auctioneer as a bid and result in your being landed with some appalling object which you had not the smallest wish to acquire. Beware too of misreading your catalogue. A friend of mine at a London auction bought an oak dresser. Following this lot came an aluminum kettle and on an impulse she bid for this too, successfully. She was rather perplexed at the high price it fetched, but consoled herself with the reflection that it was brand new and of good quality. When subsequently a delivery van arrived at her house the vanmen brought in scores and scores of kettles. My friend had, in fact, bought not one but a *gross* of kettles—part of the stock of a bankrupt ironmonger.

Mishaps of this kind are not likely to occur in our local salesroom. We have no catalogues. The lots are numbered and ticketed and we simply wander around the hall on view day making a note of everything that takes our fancy.

The room has an atmosphere very much its own. We know most of the people who attend it and there are not many dealers to cast an atmosphere of big business over the scene. The goods for sale usually consist of old bedsteads and bedding, worm-eaten wardrobes, settees and armchairs whose coverings and springs leave much to be desired; rusty gas stoves, threadbare carpets, horrible lawnmowers and the usual odds and ends of cracked domestic china and undistinguished flotsam washed up on the tide of many removals. But occasionally there appear one or two items which are really good and which we hope will not attract too much attention. The room itself is like an oven in the summer and freezing cold in winter. There is also a basement which is often flooded and here are stored all those unsold goods which are brought up at each fresh sale in the hope that some misguided fanatic will make a bid of a shilling or two. These goods get staler and mustier and more mildewed every month and are greeted by the regulars with derisive jeers and much ribald comment.

The room is in charge of a porter who is heavy handed with the more fragile goods and a sale is often punctuated by dismal crashes signifying that the value of a piece of china has depreciated alarmingly. But, like Cassius, the porter has an itching palm, and a shilling or so works wonders if one is in need of co-operation.

The auctioneer, bless his heart, is a jolly, friendly soul with infinite patience and tact. He knows nothing, or very little,

about the value of the better quality goods he has to sell, but as, in his world, every goose is a swan, he does his best for everybody and works frantically hard to get the best price he can.

The beginning of the sale is heralded by the ringing of a bell—rather like a school bell—and in we troop into the room. The first lots are generally very dull and uninteresting. Indeed, it is quite difficult to imagine what buyers will do with electric fireplaces without elements, washstands with cracked marble tops and dismal-looking flock mattresses. But there is always a buyer eventually—even for junk—and looming on the horizon are the better lots.

It was at such a sale that we saw the lovely mirror which now graces our bedroom. It was obviously eighteenth century with its carved wood frame, gilded and decorated with ropes and dolphins, which enclosed a beautiful oval glass. It was large—about four feet six by three feet and absolutely perfect. We had to have it and mentally fixed a price of about twenty pounds, which would have been cheap.

Naturally, we anticipated fearful competition and tried hard not to look at it too much in case it should attract too much attention. But as it shone out like a jewel it was extremely difficult to ignore.

On the day of the sale we spent some hours in considerable mental anguish, being forced even to swallow some of the dark-brown tea for sale in an attached canteen in order to try and steady our nerves. Eventually the lot came up. Swiftly the bidding rose—one pound, thirty shillings, two pounds, two-ten, three, three-ten, four. There it stuck. I took a deep breath and said, “Four-ten.” After what seemed like an age the hammer fell and the mirror was ours. To this day I cannot understand why we got it so cheaply. I can only suppose that most people thought it was a Victorian overmantel and consequently were not prepared to pay more than a few pounds for it.

But on another occasion I was not as lucky. One item upon which I had cast an acquisitive eye was a small lacquered cabinet with Sèvres panels. As a period piece it was superb, and as a wine cupboard exactly the piece I had been searching for. This lot did not appear to attract much attention and I was reasonably certain that I should get it for a modest price. It was on the point of being knocked down to me when in walked a prominent

dealer who had a special commission to buy the piece for a customer. I bid up to twenty-five pounds, which was more than I could afford, and then had to let it go. In spite of my disappointment I was glad that the vendor, for once, had received something approaching the value of the article sold.

Of course, it must be remembered that nobody knows everything. Catalogues are not always the guide they seem to be, because not all firms of auctioneers employ the services of valuers and antiquarians. Many items are wrongly described and one has usually to regard a catalogue as nothing more than an indication of the contents of a sale. I was once at a sale in a seaside town where a number of candlesticks catalogued as Colebrookdale were fetching outrageous prices. I noticed that they were all bought by a famous dealer who had come from London. My guess was that they were Chelsea. When I tackled the dealer about this he gave me a knowing wink and that was all the help I got from him. The buyer who has some specialized knowledge is much more likely to pick up an occasional bargain. My own particular study is eighteenth-century pottery. Very little of this was ever marked and much of it was copied at a later date. One has therefore to find out all one can about the period, the factories, the style and the colors of the glazes used and so on.

At one sale I attended there was very little except junk. But there was one item catalogued as "a green ware plaque." It was hanging on a wall in between a print of "The Stag at Bay" and a broken kitchen chair suspended from a hook. The plaque was unmistakably a very large, handsome and absolutely perfect Whieldon dish or charger. Now, this raised an interesting point of ethics. Should I have gone to the auctioneer and said, "Look, old chap, you've made an error here. Lot so-and-so is rare and valuable," or should I have held my peace and said nothing, keeping my fingers crossed? Undoubtedly I should have taken the former course.

I much regret to say that my high principles were completely overwhelmed by my baser instincts and I bought the lot for five shillings, being the only bidder.

Private house sales usually provide a friendlier atmosphere than the public auction room but have certain additional hazards which must be guarded against. Many people regard these sales

as forlorn occasions signifying the breaking up and dispersal of a once happy home. Others regard them as a social event—an opportunity for a day out and a chance to examine the belongings of people who were often friends and acquaintances. But one must adopt a realistic attitude. Those articles which may have had sentimental associations have nearly always been removed and the remainder left to fetch the best price it can.

The person one has to beware of at the private house sale is the souvenir hunter. This is a friend of the family who is determined to own something belonging to "dear Emily" or "old Charles" or whoever the previous owner might have been. Such people will make fantastic bids for an article irrespective of its age, beauty or intrinsic value. Whenever you observe one of these characters with a glazed look in his or her eye and a wildly fluttering catalogue, beware. Look the other way, go for a walk, do anything except bid against them, because you haven't got a chance. Far better let them pay the earth for what they want and reserve your energies and your money for something which does not involve such avid competition.

Another difficulty is the fact that the selling area is often more congested than at a public sale. The house will have been open for viewing of the contents either for a day or two days preceding the sale. You will thus have had ample opportunity to examine the lots and make your mind up about the articles you wish to bid for. On the day of the sale all the rooms are likely to be locked except the one in which the auctioneer has placed his rostrum. The porters may or may not bring in certain items to show or the auctioneer may go from room to room if he desires. In any event you will have little or no chance to look at the lots during the sale. You may also find yourself crammed into a passage or hallway well out of the sight of the auctioneer. You will therefore have to shout loudly when bidding, and you will also have to pay strict attention to your catalogue. Otherwise you may find yourself several lots behind and start bidding for a plated cruet stand and other oddments instead of the Chippendale wall mirror on which you had set your heart.

Do not neglect the attics and outhouses, and make a particular point of looking at *everything*. You never know where you will find treasure or what form it will take. It pays to be observant. Recently the owner of an old manor house in Dorset disposed

of unwanted furniture and other goods. He was modernizing one wing and wanted to refurnish in a contemporary style. The furniture was all oak—very heavy, very large and exceedingly ornate. There were massive chests, gigantic court cupboards, huge tables, enormous wardrobes and beds, suitable only for another house of the same proportions or for breaking up. It did not even have much antiquarian value because much of it was Dutch of an unattractive period. There was also a large collection of domestic china which included ewers, basins and the convenient but often ridiculed chamber-pot. My wife and I gave the items a cursory glance and decided that the sale wasn't really worth bothering about as there was nothing we really wanted. What I did not know, because I had not bothered to look, was that all of this domestic china had been specially made for the family by the Swansea factory at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was rare as well as being quite valuable even though the decorations were simple as befitted its status. So that was another lesson I learned. Never take anything for granted or expect the compiler of an auctioneer's catalogue to be an authority on the goods he is selling.

At my next sale I did use my eyes and I spotted a lovely little French inkwell in pink and pearl lustre, the lid mounted in gold and the well decorated with a miniature by Angelica Kauffman, tucked away in a waste-paper basket in company with a brush and crumb tray. I couldn't believe that this charming object had been hidden in such sordid cover for any other reason than that somebody had done it deliberately in order to buy the lot for nothing. This sort of thing does happen—especially with small and valuable articles. I have known dishonest dealers break a piece of carving off a mirror, pocket the broken piece, and then buy the article cheaply. Goods which can be easily hidden are frequently stolen. At one sale I attended a rare Russian gold piece vanished into thin air and at another a bag full of Victorian jet jewelry disappeared from a trunk. If you suspect that somebody is planning to circumvent the convention of bidding for an article, do what I did with the inkwell. I went to the head porter in charge, told him that I was going to bid for lot number so-and-so, that there was a particular object in the lot I wanted and if it wasn't there when I bid I would raise a rumpus such as had never been raised before. I must have frightened him dreadfully because the next day when I bought the lot he

made a particular point of handing me the waste-paper basket with *all* its contents intact. The price? Six shillings. I still don't know why or how the inkwell got into the basket.

Do not neglect the attics and the outhouses. Often you will find a broken chair, a table or some other item which only needs attention to restore it to something approaching its original condition. It is worth remembering that when houses began to be furnished in the Victorian style much of the elegant Georgian and Regency furniture was relegated to the attics and the servant's quarters—some articles even got covered with coats of paint. One of my cherished ambitions is to be let loose in a house where the attics have not been turned out for a hundred years. The very thought of it makes my mouth water. I would brave all the rats and mice, spiders, cobwebs and dirt to get my hands on an unknown Ralph Wood toby jug, an Astbury horse or a Tompion or Mudge bracket clock which had been forgotten for a century. Maybe that dream will come true one day. I do know one such house but both its location and its owner are guarded by me with a degree of secrecy which would make the security measures surrounding the hydrogen bomb pale into insignificance. My aim is to preserve—not destroy. In the meantime I poke around in sheds and outhouses hoping for the best.

I once sat through a long, dull sale with nothing to reward me for my patience. The auctioneer had reached the last item of the outside effects at dusk on a bleak winter's day. We were all very cold and longing to get home. I was the only bidder for a lot described tersely as "the contents of the woodshed," and got it for five shillings. I bought "blind"—that is to say without having inspected the woodshed owing to an unaccustomed oversight. It took my wife and me nearly a day to clear that lot! Our ancient station wagon made three journeys to and fro loaded to the roof. There was almost a ton of sawn logs for a start—a large quantity of sawn and planed planks ready for use, tins of paint, flower pots, various garden tools, a number of picture frames—even a pair of white flannel trousers which, when cleaned and pressed, were as good as new and which have graced many a local cricket field.

So take my tip—don't ever omit to look in the woodshed, even if you fear there may be "something nasty" in it.

The busy person who has no time to attend sales will find it worth while to patronize the shops and stalls in the markets. Nearly every large English town has a market with its quota of second-hand shops and junk stalls. Londoners are particularly fortunate. Although the old Caledonian Market has ceased to function, the Portobello Road seems to have taken its place in the affections of the bargain hunter. The stalls and most of the shops are only open on Saturdays and you can find almost anything you want there from a brass fender to a roomful of linen-fold panelling. You will see the dealers scurrying from shop to shop, from the man who will buy anything in which he can see a profit to those who buy only silver, pictures, furniture, porcelain or pieces for interior decoration. You will see the dilettante in search of a miniature, a Battersea enamel box, a piece of Capo di Monte; or the housewife looking for a pretty plate or a cheap chest of drawers. All tastes are catered to and there is something for everybody, whether of large or small means. It is most extraordinary how the goods go round and round. My friend Tanner spends frequent holidays with us in which he combines business with pleasure. He usually takes back anything he can buy locally for his shop. He recently sent to London a large Berlin vase decorated with a massive cupid, an oak Tudor cradle and various other articles, all of which he disposed of at a satisfactory profit. And recently a local dealer came back from London with a fine pair of Georgian candlesticks which he had bought in the Portobello Road. There is always a continuous search for goods—pieces will move from the West of England to London—then to the north or east. Now many of them are being shipped to America, so the American antique-hunter can join in this fascinating pursuit.

I used to know most of the London markets. I was a regular visitor to the Cut and Lambeth Walk, to Chapel Street, Islington, and East Street, Walworth. I knew little old junk shops hidden away in back streets in Chalk Farm, Fulham, Plumstead, the Old Kent Road and Bethnal Green. Not long ago I went from Aldgate to Canning Town and from Canning Town to Bow and Whitechapel, and found hardly a single shop familiar to me in the old days. Most of them disappeared during the war.

Lately, however, I became attached to Church Street, Edge-ware Road. This market has all the friendliness and gusto one associates with such places. On Saturday afternoons there is a

delightful character who auctions fruit and who has a keen and ready wit. There are some good stalls at which the occasional bargain is to be found. My best buy in Church Street was a set of Venetian ornamental table glass. It consisted of a center piece and six others representing dolphins, the whole linked together with a glass chain. It was delicate and fragile and altogether lovely. The set cost six pounds ten and was a present for my wife. She was delighted with it. So delighted, in fact, that she wrote a story about it called *The Dancing Dolphins* which she sold in England and America.

We have in our home an antique wrought-iron lamp-bracket which is ideal for our low-ceilinged hall. This was bought at a junk stall in Church Street and cost seven and sixpence. It was painted a hideous green, but cleaned and enamelled black it now looks most effective.

It often pays dividends to become friendly with shopkeepers or stallholders, purely from the point of view that if they like you and trust you to give them a fair deal they will often put things by for you. You do not have to buy them but you can have a first look, as it were. When I was in London my friends in the trade would often give me a wink when there was another customer in the shop and when we were alone produce some article or other from its hiding place. I cannot truthfully say that I ever obtained any great treasure in this way, but I was buying only for my own enjoyment and many of the things I was shown would have earned a handsome profit had I been in business. In any event I much appreciated the gesture.

Our market town has the junkiest shop you ever saw. It is stacked to the roof with beds, mattresses, chairs, piles of tottering china and stacks of picture frames. A visit there is an adventure. You have literally to crawl through tunnels of furniture in order to get at something you wish to examine at the back, and all the time you are in imminent danger of the whole edifice collapsing. The good lady who runs it has little knowledge of market values but is strictly businesslike. No matter whether an article is new or old, she merely adds a modest and unfluctuating percentage to the price at which she bought it. She is more than satisfied with this arrangement—and so are her customers. We have bought many useful things at her shop and one great treasure—a Whieldon fruit dish.

On the other hand there are junk shops which are not always

what they would appear to be. I was once in a seaport when I spotted down by the docks a very dirty shop window filled with an incredible assortment of goods draped in cobwebs. Hidden away at the back was a very fine old Staffordshire cow —a rare piece. It was of the earlier period before the days when Staffordshire factories were turning out vast quantities of the crude cottage china of the mid-Victorian period. I thought this was a golden opportunity to acquire a treasure at a modest price. But when, after some preliminary skirmishing, I inquired the price, it was five pounds. I picked up various other items and was asked as much for each one as I would have been in a first-class antique shop. I then realized that the shopkeeper knew to a fraction of a penny the highest market price for his goods and had baited a skilful trap for the unwary. Many people would *think* they had a find, even though the price was high, and would assume that the article bought was worth much more money.

Jumble sales are another valuable source of profit and pleasure. The average town or country jumble sale is generally a means of raising money for the church, the village hall, women's institute, scout troop or some other organization. The goods for sale are donated and produce an extraordinary assortment of old clothes, part-worn boots and shoes, books, periodicals, fire irons and every conceivable kind of unused and unwanted domestic appliance. There is in addition nearly always something which is old or rare and which can be bought for a song. We have a lovely small cauliflower teapot of the eighteenth century which we bought for sixpence at a jumble ; a handsome, very early Spode blue and white platter (price twopence), and several other articles, of no great intrinsic value but much artistic merit, which have cost next to nothing.

It must be remembered that one has to be athletic to do well at a jumble. Most of the devotees are large and imposing women with huge shopping baskets which they use as weapons. They have elbows like battering-rams and an inflexible resolve to get to the counters first. One has to be very careful not to get knocked down and trampled on when the doors are opened and the ladies stampede like a herd of buffalo. Some of them are quite ruthless and the weakling is liable to get knocked out of the way with a sweep of a brawny arm. One has to adopt a process of infiltration to get anywhere. Never let go once

you have got your hands on an article even though you may have to endure sharp raps on the knuckles and wrists from envious females in attempts to make you relinquish your prize. No holds are barred and jumble sale attendance is almost as hazardous as football.

But even in this stronghold of free enterprise big business is creeping in. We attended a summer fête in the grounds of an old manor house nearby at which the *pièce de résistance*, for us, was a jumble stall. We anticipated that there might be one or two articles from the house which might be worth having. Unfortunately our car, which was very ancient, had difficulty in negotiating a steep hill and we were late in arriving. As we had thought, there *were* a number of nice things on the stall. I say "were" because we arrived just in time to see several fine pieces of decorative Leeds china being carted away by a dealer and we had the mortification of watching them loaded into his van. He had bought them all for a song. This, in our view, was not playing the game and in a spasm of rage I bought the last piece on the stall, a broken fruit dish which had been spurned by the dealer. It was quite worthless—although I did patch it up and give it to a friend who is probably not my friend any longer.

Tanner has a recurrent dream about jumble sales which always takes a particular form. In it he walks casually up to a stall and sees a perfect Bow harlequin figure, marked sixpence. He buys it and is about to turn away when the attendant dives into a box, pulls something out and says, "Would you like the other one at the same price?"





### CHAPTER THREE

## POTTERY AND PORCELAIN

AM fortunate in possessing four of the greatest blessings which life can offer. In the proper order of importance they are: a loving wife, good health, a home in the country and sufficient leisure to do what I want. Of course, I do not have any money to speak of, but one does not have everything in this world. "Take what you want," says God, "and pay for it." When I finally left the Civil Service in 1950 all my friends and colleagues thought I was mad. The Treasury was beginning to establish the temporary war-time posts and I was offered one of them. I suppose I should have been flattered. Security is the Mecca of most peoples' lives and nothing could be more secure than an established post in the Civil Service. Certainly I was grateful for the offer, even if it was somewhat belated, but I could not visualize myself going to and from St. John's Wood to Whitehall for the next twenty years. Also, we had just acquired our Dorset home and the builders were hard at work on the conversion. I should have had to commute to Dorset at week-ends and look after myself in town during the week. I was quite capable of doing the latter but there did not seem to be much point in it. My wife and I talked things over carefully and we decided, for better or worse, that we would retire to the country while we were still young enough to enjoy it. In any event I had been working hard for a long time, and although the cynic would not consider that a post in the Civil

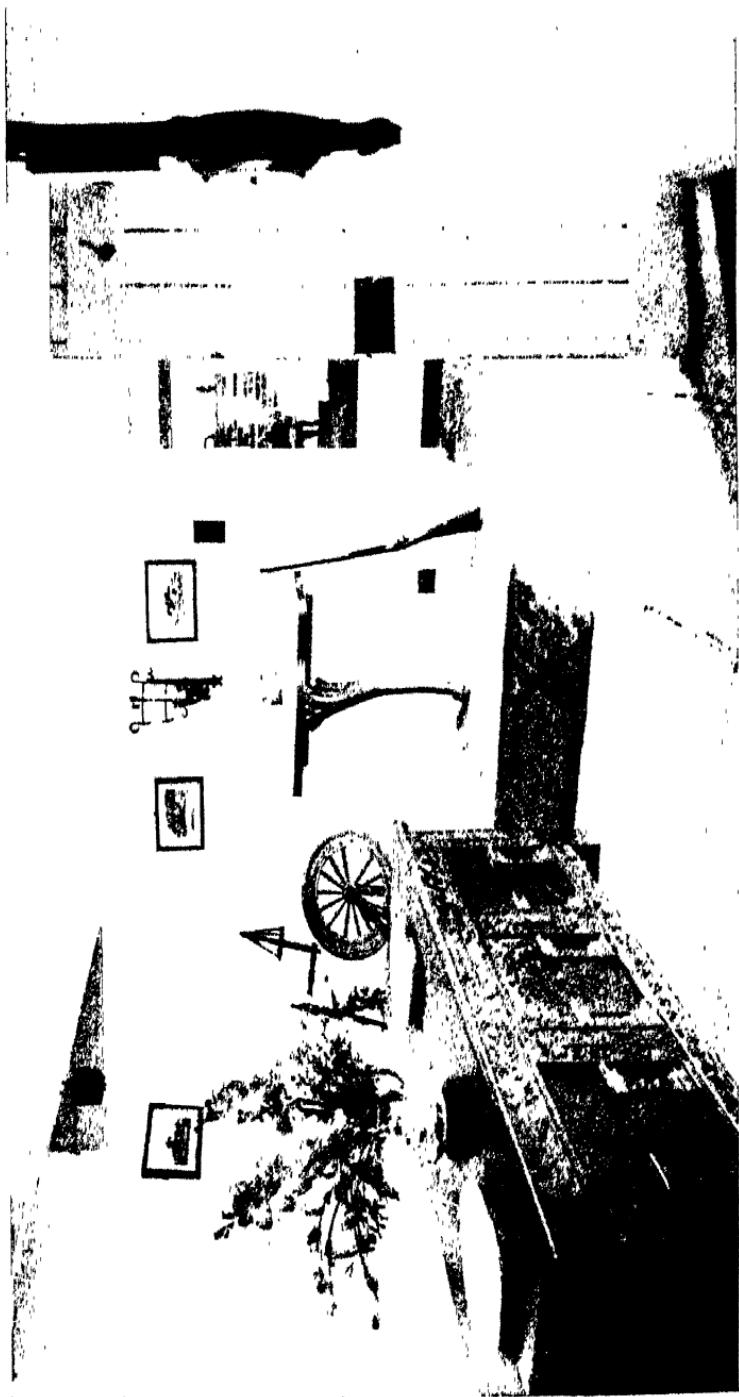


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PLATE I : An unusual view of the Purbeck Hills seen through drawing-room window. Showing old Berlin oil lamp

PLATE 2: Entrance hall of author's Dorset home. Showing Jacobean chest, spinning-wheel, eighteenth-century console table, Alken hunting prints and loving cup

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Service could actually be described as work, we in the Press Office of the Board of Trade did put in a good stint, even though our unorthodox methods and our insistence that we were paid to obtain information for the Press caused many of the permanent officials to wonder what the world was coming to.

So I took my presentation clock, which I insisted on having, as I had contributed over the years to any number of wedding and parting gifts, and we shook the dust of the big city from our feet. Sometimes I have regretted my decision, especially when I read of the Civil Service obtaining a large pay increase. I fall into a daydream and try to figure out what I should now have been earning, taking into account the various promotions which might have come my way. Then I walk into my garden, look at the Purbeck Hills and the sea, and think that I am really best off. My old colleagues earn fat salaries but they have all the headaches I used to have, while I have time to look at the world, feel the sun and wind on my face and can go to auction sales whenever I feel like it.

I used to attend reunion dinners of an organization known as AMPRA, which, being interpreted, means Air Ministry Public Relations Association. It is an outfit which aims at gathering under one roof for purposes of jollification the diverse characters, service and civilian, who worked in the Air Ministry public relations units during the war. We were a temperamental rebellious crowd of journalists, writers, lawyers, stockbrokers and other assorted characters who came together for the duration of the war, did a pretty good job, and then dispersed to the four winds. Some, like Terence Rattigan, H. E. Bates, John Pudney and R. F. Delderfield, were established writers when they joined and have become even more famous since. Some have gone back into business and have stayed happily glued to office desks. But on the one or two occasions when I attended these reunion functions I was so horrified at the effects of age and worldly success—in the shape of bald heads and paunches—that I fled back to my rural fastness thankfully rejoicing that the years had dealt more kindly with me. You may wonder what possible bearing this diversion has upon the collection of antiques. It has little, except to stress the importance of leisure as a factor both in collecting and studying. If I had not retired when I did, and refused to go back to a regular job even when the outlook was far from bright, I would certainly not be writing

about antiques today, for I would not have learned enough to qualify for the task. This does not mean that I urge everyone to stop work at once. Conditions have changed even in the last six years, and in this era of five-day weeks and eight-hour days no one can possibly complain of not having time enough for a new hobby or pursuit. The public libraries are well stocked with reference works. It is not necessary to look far if you are sufficiently interested in, say, ceramics, glass or any other special branch. Many volumes in the libraries are the more valuable because they have been long out of print and most of them contain the result of a lifetime of research.

All I can hope to do is to attract the attention of the uninitiated by putting up a few signposts here and there. I would suggest that one of the first things to do is to go and look at some of the great collections. The Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum in London house examples of the world's finest craftsmanship. In the United States there are many museums and private collections which can be viewed.

The Victoria and Albert tends to specialise in English and continental porcelain of the eighteenth century, and the British Museum in oriental porcelain. One disadvantage is that one is not allowed to handle the exhibits, but one can gaze to one's heart's content and I believe that it is possible to examine a particular object more closely providing that you do so in company with a museum official. But this is probably a privilege which is granted only to a favored few who have a particular reason for requiring a closer inspection. This rule is understandable as most of the exhibits are priceless and irreplaceable. But I must confess that the sight of room after room filled with some of the finest pottery and porcelain the world has produced is a visual experience not easily forgotten.

My only objection to large collections is that the eye cannot take in everything and one has to discipline oneself. Therefore, do not flit about like a butterfly but concentrate at each visit upon the products of one factory and leave the rest for another visit.

Let us consider first of all the distinction between pottery and porcelain. How is it possible to tell one from another? It is simply this. Pottery is opaque, which means that you cannot see through it; while porcelain is more or less transparent. Pottery belongs to the oldest of civilizations—the history

of porcelain does not go much beyond a thousand years. It is quite easy to tell the difference. You have only to go into any large store and examine a piece of modern pottery side by side with a piece of porcelain from the present-day products of—say, the Wedgwood or Copeland factories.

English antique porcelain is nearly always soft paste, or artificial porcelain. Oriental and continental porcelain is invariably hard paste or true porcelain. I need not go into the manufacturing processes except to say that the Chinese were probably the first to discover the secret of true porcelain—hence the generic term of “china.”

All the amateur collector needs to know is the difference between true and artificial antique porcelain. True porcelain is hard and cold to the touch, brilliantly white and glistening, pure and clear if held against the light; the edge of the footrim, which is free from glaze, is of close, compact texture often slightly browned by the firing. It will turn the edge of a knife or resist a file. The colors painted on the glaze stand out in layers and the enamels do not combine with it but will often chip away.

Artificial porcelain is granular and can be scraped with a knife. The ware often has a creamy tint and when looked at against a strong light may be faintly of a greenish-yellow tinge. The enamels will have sunk in and become incorporated into the soft oily glaze.

There is, in addition, a third kind of ware first manufactured in the nineteenth century. It is called English bone-porcelain which is a compromise between true and artificial porcelain.

A good method of examining the two types of porcelain is to buy a broken piece of, say, antique Derby and a piece of chipped Chinese. You can cut them about and file them and do what you like. At the end of your experiments you will be in no doubt as to the difference. Knowledge of colors, decorations, patterns, modelling and marks can only be acquired gradually and there is much to be learned.

I, of course, have been wrong a thousand times. I have proudly hugged a piece of porcelain to my bosom in the fond belief that it was Chelsea only to discover when I tried to scrape it with a knife that it was the hardest of hard paste and in consequence could not possibly be anything of the kind. I have mixed up marks and made all kinds of errors. But on the

occasions when I have been right—sometimes in the face of stiff expert opinion—I have been mightily pleased with myself.

Marks are only a guide when everything else has fallen into place. Not every piece was marked and many factory marks were copied by other manufacturers and sometimes even forged. One must not rely too much upon marks, they are merely a link in the chain of identification.

Some of the earliest examples of English pottery, known as Lambeth Delft, date from the reign of Charles II. Generally speaking, however, the golden period was the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which produced such potters as Thomas Toft, the brothers Elers, the Wood family of Burslem, John Astbury, Thomas Whieldon, Wedgwood and Josiah Spode. The firm of Spode is still in existence and it is interesting to quote from an account book of Whieldon's dated April 1749, when he employed the first Spode as an apprentice :

“ Hired Siah Spode, to give him from this time to Martelmas next 2s. 3d., or 2s. 6d. if he deserves it; 2nd year, 2s. 9d., 3rd year, 3s. 3d., paid full earnest 1s.”

And three years later :

“ Hired Josiah Spoad for next Martelmas. Per week 7s.; I am to give him earnest 5s.; paid in part 5s.

Obviously Siah had made the grade.

In addition to the Staffordshire factories, of which there were a great number, pottery was made at Sunderland, Newcastle, Liverpool and many other towns. Many of the factories were small and lasted only a short time. The manufacturers copied each other's work, both in design and decoration, and in consequence quite a fog exists when we come to examine the pottery of the period. In any event it is now unlikely that much early English pottery is to be found outside museums and private collections. In fact, and here I am perhaps being a little heretical, some of it has little beyond its antiquarian and intrinsic value to commend it. Much of it was crude in design and unpleasing in decoration, although the early slipware is not without attraction. This pottery is usually of a dark-red color with the decoration piped on as though on an iced cake.

One cannot like everything and my own particular preference is for the work of Astbury, Whieldon and the Woods, although here again, some of the very highly prized toby jugs made by Ralph Wood, Whieldon, Turner and others cannot be described as anything but savage and ugly in design. The attraction lies in their beautiful glazes and the fact that they do represent a period of history which was essentially lusty, bawdy and full of life. Nowadays the discovery of a genuine eighteenth-century toby jug brings a flush of excitement to the face of the collector. There was a time, well within living memory, when it was possible to find these jugs hidden away in cottages and inns, dusty and forgotten. And there must still be some, glowing in a corner of a shelf or at the back of a cupboard.

I have only one toby and I have not yet been able to identify it even though I have taken it to the Victoria and Albert Museum. I found it when I was on a foraging expedition with Tanner. I pored over it in secret while he was groping about among the more obvious articles for sale in a country antique shop. I finally bought it for three pounds. He did his level best to dissuade me—we have a fixed policy of sneering at each other's finds—but I was adamant and even borrowed the money from him to pay for it. It has a W hidden away on the side of the hat and the figure has a green coat, yellow waistcoat and stockings and a blue stock, and is holding a brown pot. The breeches are unglazed. The thick, treacly glaze has run, as is customary, so that some of the colors slightly overlap at the edge. It is a handsome specimen. But as with so many early examples it seems difficult to pin it down to a particular factory. My own guess is that it is either Whieldon or early Wedgwood. It is not, I will freely admit, like any Whieldon toby in the Victoria and Albert, but Whieldon did use these colored glazes and so did Wedgwood. My guess is that it was made by Wedgwood when he was a pupil of Whieldon, and I will stick to this opinion until I am proved wrong.

I also have a very early Sunderland Bacchus jug. I have never seen another like it and I know that in this piece I have a rare and genuine treasure. I show it with pride to those who fancy themselves as connoisseurs and ask them if they can detect where it has been restored. Few of them can. When I bought it, my Bacchus jug had a triangular bit missing from the left-hand side of the spout, though it was otherwise without a chip

or even a hair crack. In this condition it was naturally worth very little and the dealer was delighted to let me have it for a few shillings. I bought it only for study, as I had often done before with broken examples of Sèvres, Derby, Whieldon, Delft and other types of porcelain and pottery. But when I took it home my wife was so fascinated by it, by the grinning mask of the wine god with his pointed ears and crown of vine leaves modelled on the belly of the jug, that she determined to have it repaired, cost what it might. After making extensive inquiries we heard of a mysterious person in a London back street who runs a "china hospital" and restores valuable pieces for high-class dealers and private collectors all over the country. His method is to grind down actual bits of paste of the identical type of the item under repair, model and attach the missing parts and then re-fire in his own kiln and decorate, copying the style of the original artist.

The result, owing to his extreme skill, can hardly be detected except by the eagle eye of the expert. We have some friends who had a Dresden candelabrum doctored in this way. It was in bad shape, one of the cherubs' heads was missing, also several hands and wings and floral portions of intricate modelling. When it was returned to them it had regained all of its original beauty and they were so delighted that they passed on to us the name and address of the magician. Thus we were able to submit our piece for his attention. It is unnecessary to say that he is snowed under with work, and it was two years before our jug came back to us—but the long wait had been worth while for it looked as perfect as when it had first left the potter's hands some two hundred years ago. Even the lustre round the lip had been duplicated, by what means I am unable to say. The cost? It seemed to us unbelievably little. It was sixteen shillings. The value of the jug is certainly not less than ten pounds—although of course we could not actually sell it, even if we wanted to, without disclosing that it has been restored.

I offer the anecdote as an instance of the fact that the small collector may do as we did—buy a damaged piece and get it restored—and in this way acquire an article he could not otherwise afford to buy. It is several years since our jug was mended, and in that time special training centers have been opened where ex-servicemen and others are taught the art of china restoration by the expert method described. It is by no means difficult to

get on the track of a reliable practitioner. Your local antique dealer will give you the information, since it is no longer needful to keep it a closely guarded secret.

While on the subject of repairs we may as well cover it more extensively. If you break one of your precious Rockingham cups you don't any longer have to put up with disfiguring rivets. You can have it mended by the new "bonding" process. The fragments are stuck together with a new kind of china cement and then the cup is re-fired.

Incidentally, if you like to eat off fine antique plates, as we do, you must remember to treat them with reverence both before and after the meal. *Don't* warm them in a red-hot oven, and don't wash them up afterwards with anything but a soft cloth and lukewarm soapy water. If they have applied decoration in gilt or enamel colors these will gradually flake off in the course of time even under quite gentle treatment. The use of soda, detergents, very hot water and, above all, those beastly metal pot-scourers, will hasten the process of destruction. This is one of the few cases where a lick and a promise is better than a good scrub. After a dinner party I have noticed my wife, when she thinks no one is looking, wipe over our precious Derby dessert dishes with a damp cloth instead of dipping them in the sink. Jolly unhygienic, no doubt; but both of us have contrived to reach our middle years in a redoubtably healthy state, so no objections are raised by the other member of the household. And meanwhile, the gilding on our Derby dishes looks as good as new.

It should be remembered that eighteenth-century English pottery was decorated with colored glazes, not enamelled or painted, and the colors used were either primaries or strong greens and browns. The glazes were thick and ran slightly into each other. The designers often took rustic subjects for their models, such as gardeners, yokels, sweeps, and cows, dogs and horses. Not a great deal of this pottery was marked, although Ralph Wood signed much of his work, and Wedgwood, when he began his own factory, impressed his ware with his name.

There has recently been a revival of interest in Wedgwood, and the black, blue and green ware with raised classical figures has become much sought after. But his earlier work, however, is of quite a different character and is worth looking for, more especially as much of it is unmarked.

The nineteenth century saw the production of the great flood of Staffordshire cottage pottery, much of it of an equestrian design. It has a rustic quaintness which is not unattractive, and some historical interest owing to that fact that many of the figures modelled—such as Wellington, Nelson and other famous men—were living at the time. Similarly, more modern potters produced toby jugs using famous figures of the past two wars as their models. I can recollect the time when pieces of Staffordshire could be picked up for a shilling or two in the Caledonian market. Not long ago I was at a sale where they were fetching anything up to four pounds. This, in my view, was out of all proportion for these pleasant, but essentially crude examples of Staffordshire ware.

Antique English porcelain is among the most highly sought after in the world. The best of it, before over-elaborate painting and tasteless gilding became fashionable, is highly prized and exceedingly rare and valuable. It was nearly all soft paste, having a glowing delicate finish in contrast to the glittering hardness of continental porcelain.

There were some sixteen major factories manufacturing porcelain in England during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were at Bow, Chelsea, Derby, Worcester, Longton Hall, Caughley, Coalport, Plymouth, Bristol, Liverpool, Lowestoft, Swansea, Nantgarw and one or two towns in Staffordshire. Most of these factories had a large output and the designers and decorators moved about from factory to factory. Thus we find that Billingsley, who was a famous artist employed at Worcester, later worked at Swansea, and the movement of these ceramic artists often complicates the identification of unmarked porcelain. There is also some confusion about the history of certain factories. For instance, there are authorities who insist that the Lowestoft factory never existed at all, or, if it did, it manufactured only the rough biscuit which was decorated elsewhere. Others say that the ware was sent to China for decoration. This contention seems somewhat odd in view of the fact that nearly all the English factories copied the Chinese style, but I was told a story which has some bearing on this theory. A dealer friend showed me a piece of Lowestoft on which was painted the words, "Pick this out in blue." The explanation he gave was that the piece was part of a consignment sent to China for decoration. The Chinese artist,

who knew no English, had copied everything—including the instructions!

Of the English factories probably the best known is that of Chelsea which began in 1740 and continued until about 1784 when it was taken over by Derby. It is the ambition of every amateur collector to find a piece of Chelsea lying unheeded in a shop window, on a junk stall or at a jumble sale. I am afraid that this porcelain has now become so rare and so well known that the chance of buying it cheaply is practically non-existent. As long ago as the year 1902 a Chelsea egg-holder in the form of a goose fetched £24 at a Dublin sale and it is now a common-place for Chelsea figures to fetch hundreds of pounds in London salesrooms. All that you and I can do is to admire it from afar and trust that one day we may be lucky enough to find a broken piece which does not cost the earth—unless we are lucky enough to have relatives who own these priceless relics of the past. Therefore I can only counsel you to look at as much Chelsea porcelain as you can and store up the knowledge for future use. Nothing like it is being manufactured today and it is astonishing to reflect that so many fragile and perfect specimens have survived the depredations of heavy-handed housemaids for over two hundred years. One of the finest collections is in the possession of the Duchess of Northumberland at Albury Park in Surrey, not far from Dorking. She has a magnificent clock—very ornate but exceedingly beautiful—which must be worth a very large sum of money.

It is not easy to give the amateur a short guide to the characteristics of the ware of any porcelain factory. Many have attempted it and, to my way of thinking, they only succeed in bewildering the reader. The only certain way in which to acquire knowledge in the field of ceramics is to do so by observation and by handling all the pieces you can.

So far as Chelsea porcelain is concerned one need only be concerned at first with some idea of the chronology of the factory. The productions fall roughly into five divisions. The first period lasted for about eleven years until 1751, the ware being marked with an incised triangle. This was the period which produced the famous goat-and-bee jug; the second period lasted about two years, the mark being an incised triangle and the decorations primarily oriental; the third (red anchor) period lasted until 1758 and produced a large quantity of table ware,

rococo vases, scent bottles, figures, dessert dishes in the form of various leaves—cabbage, fig, artichoke, mulberry etc.—and a number of vessels shaped after lettuces, cauliflowers, lemons, apples, and so on. The paintings were of birds, insects, flowers and small landscapes with, later, richly decorated pieces in the continental style. The fourth period (gold anchor) produced the wonderful *gros bleu* coloring, which has never been equalled, rich gilding and elaborately painted panels. The final period, which was more restrained artistically, lasted about fourteen years, during which time the factory was taken over by Derby. The ware became known as Chelsea-Derby with a mark which combined the Chelsea anchor with the Derby D.

I often speculate, by the way, as to whether even Chelsea ware is worth the money paid for it today. It seems to me that the value has been inflated out of all proportion. Nothing is so vulnerable as fine porcelain. If you own a piece which is so valuable that it has to be kept in a strong-box at your bank, what is the use of it to you or anyone else? It was made to give you pleasure, for display if it is purely decorative and for use if it is functional.

Though I myself own nothing which will ever be fought over by international connoisseurs I do have a breakfast service of great age and considerable rarity—and I use it every day of my life. To drink from a fine old Spode cup adds much to my enjoyment of its contents.

The first time Tanner came to stay with us he was horrified to see a whole row of such cups dangling from hooks on the kitchen dresser. "They ought to be locked up in a cabinet," he said. "Supposing they get broken?"

"That," I replied, "is the occupational risk of domestic china, whether it was made by Josiah Spode nearly two hundred years ago or by a modern potter last week."

Tanner could not agree, and as he went over our house constantly discovering fresh crimes of the same order—such as a Meissen *bonbonnière* holding some rather sticky toffees and a Bloor Derby dish full of mango chutney—he gave me up as a bad job.

I have dealt with the Chelsea factory at greater length than I intended for various reasons. To a great extent this factory set a standard of workmanship which was unequalled by any

other English factory and with the passing years its products become increasingly rare and valuable. And if you can identify a piece of Chelsea you are on the way to becoming a connoisseur, because there are many similarities in the ware of this and other factories—both in modelling and in decoration. It is sometimes difficult, for instance, to distinguish between Bow and Chelsea figures, especially when they are undecorated. As a rule, Bow figure painting is not as good as Chelsea ; the colors, a sealing-wax red, a cold enamel blue and a strong purple-gold, are different, and the bases of the figures are more elaborate and less well proportioned than those of Chelsea. But these are subtle distinctions which are visible only to the eye of the expert. I should be quite happy to possess half a dozen Bow figures whatever they looked like. This factory also produced much more domestic ware such as tea, coffee and dessert services, catering as it did more for the table than the drawing-room.

Although it is obvious that most of the best of antique English porcelain is beyond the reach of the average person for reasons of scarcity and price, it is possible to possess some specimens if you are not reaching for the moon. Many people own treasures which have come to them from other branches of their families. Familiarity breeds contempt and we are not always aware of either the age or the value of our possessions. I lecture to Women's Institutes in Dorset on pottery and porcelain and I am astonished at the number of pieces shown to me about which the owners know nothing except that they belonged to their great-grandmothers. Alternatively, I am saddened at the amount of rubbish which is highly prized. Beauty, of course, is always in the eye of the beholder and it hurts me to have to say that a piece has nothing at all to recommend it except its utility value.

And as a diversion I must relate the most humiliating experience of my own career as a collector. I had bought at a sale a large Chinese blue and white dish. The decorations included the Imperial peacock and exquisitely painted peonies. I considered I had a find even though I had not bought the dish cheaply. I pored over books on Chinese porcelain, examined marks and finally came to the conclusion that it was *K'ang-hi* of the seventeenth century. When I next went to London I took my dish with me for expert confirmation of my theory.

I marched into a Bond Street salesroom and laid it on the counter with a request for valuation. The dish was taken away by a supercilious young man who returned within a few moments, handed it back to me and said, "It has no age." I crept out and walked past the attendant feeling very much like a character in a Benchley story.

The collector of small means will do well to observe one or two simple rules. If he is collecting purely for his own pleasure and enjoyment he can gather together pieces of porcelain representative of factories of a particular period. Or he can acquire examples of work by one factory or identical articles made by several factories, such as teapots, milk jugs, sauceboats, etc. Such a collection will, if he is careful in his buying, become quite valuable as the years go by. Not long ago a fine collection of eighteenth-century teapots was sold in London for a very high price.

If one collects as an investment, one must never buy a broken or chipped piece, because only in the case of a great rarity is an imperfect piece of value. But if one is collecting only for pleasure, then the latter point is not as important.

The only representative group I have is my small collection of Whieldon pottery. Otherwise I have bought articles which pleased me and which had the double attraction of being cheap as well as typical examples of the products of many factories. I have four teapots, all old, one being a delightful "cauliflower" and another which I am told is Swansea, and pieces made by Worcester, Derby, Wedgwood, Lowestoft, Bristol, Rockingham, Spode and other English factories. My collection of continental porcelain is limited to specimens from Meissen, Vienna and an unnamed Russian factory. At this point I should like to correct a mistake which I frequently observe in references to continental porcelain. A great deal of misinformation is current concerning the products of the Meissen factory. It is not correct to refer to Meissen porcelain as Dresden. It is true that the Meissen factory was situated at Dresden but the ware must not be confused with that made by another factory in the nineteenth century which may be called Dresden and which was marked with a crown and a D. The markings of Meissen were, first, the letters K.P.M. which stood for *Königliche Porzellan Manufaktur*; an entwined AR, when the factory was in royal hands; and then the

famous crossed swords of the brilliant mid-eighteenth-century period. It was during the latter periods that the famous modeller, J. J. Kaendler, produced the wonderful figure groups which are now so highly regarded as masterpieces of ceramic art.

There is so much for the lover of antique porcelain to look for and to look at. And there is also a great deal for him to leave alone. Nearly every antique shop in the country is full of the unwanted residue of two hundred years of manufacture. A few shillings expended on a piece is no great loss, but many dealers are very blameworthy in that they try to obtain absurd prices for goods which have no merit except a dubious antiquity. It must be remembered that antique shops are regularly combed by those "in the trade." To a large extent dealers live off each other and very little escapes their predatory eyes when they are on their rounds. The merest whisper through the grapevine of something unusual at Bournemouth, for instance, will bring them flocking from London and the West Country. So it can be easily understood that much of the stock of the average antique shop has been thoroughly examined by professionals and has either been found wanting or is priced too high. You will think that I have a poor opinion of the average dealer. And you will be right. It is only very rarely that one meets a dealer who is a true lover of the antique in addition to being a business man. They are in the trade to make money and some of them are not above the most obvious tricks. Whenever a dealer fixes me with a moist eye in which crocodile tears are forming and says, "It cost me that much to buy. I'm not making a penny out of it as true as I'm standing here," I know that he is a liar and takes me for a fool. I like to compete with them at sales where I am not at such a disadvantage as I am when tackling them on their home ground. As an instance of the kind of duplicity which is practiced I must relate an incident which happened to my friend Tanner.

He was ferreting around a shop when he spotted a pair of attractive wall brackets. They were of porcelain mounted in ebony and looked unusual. He bought them at quite a high price—against my advice because I suspected there was something wrong with them, although I had no idea what it was. But he is somewhat pig-headed, especially where I am concerned, and the fact that I did not like them was a contributory factor in the purchase. He was assured by the shop proprietor that they were

old and very rare. They were certainly rare as we discovered when we were coming home. Quite suddenly the truth hit us. Somebody, who must have been both skilful and ingenious, had sawn in half the lid of an old Copeland vegetable dish. The two halves had then been mounted to form a pair of brackets. You may say that it was up to Tanner to spot the fake. I maintain that it was up to the shopkeeper to explain exactly what they were. This kind of thing is very short-sighted. The result was that although the shopkeeper made a handsome profit he lost a customer—in fact many customers, because I used always to take my friends to his shop whenever they were in my locality. On the other hand I must add that I have also met with scrupulous honesty and straight dealing in the most unexpected quarters. On one occasion I was dissuaded from buying an expensive Derby vase on the grounds that it had an almost imperceptible crack in the base. And this was in a shop where I had never been before but to which I will certainly go again.

The collector of porcelain, therefore, has many initial difficulties to overcome and numberless problems to solve before he can even begin. Especially today when the chances of buying cheaply are greatly reduced in comparison with the period even before the war. But by beginning in a modest way and deciding exactly what you are going to look for, it is possible to get together a modest collection at no great cost which will not only give you interest and pleasure but may be a source of profit as well.

Whenever I am in a strange town I make straight for the nearest junk shop. I act on the assumption that nobody knows everything and where some of the lesser known factories are concerned my own researches may come in useful.

I would advise the beginner to keep clear of oriental porcelain. This is most definitely a field which is best left to the expert. One can talk glibly about *famille noire*, *famille rose* and *famille verte* and of T'ang, Sung and Ming dynasties, but the history of Chinese porcelain covers some 1300 years and even after a lifetime's study the expert can be wrong. Getting a good piece is often more a matter of luck than knowledge, unless, of course, you go to an expert and buy a piece which is unquestionably authentic. But the man with the long purse can buy anything and there is no personal adventure in writing out a cheque for a beautiful piece—even though it is the only one of its kind in

the world—unless the search has been difficult or exciting. One of my most precious possessions came to me purely by chance. I had been at a country sale nearby for the best part of a day without buying anything at all. As a matter of fact I didn't know what I wanted except that I wanted *something*. The furniture was nearly all eighteenth-century—rather large Chippendale bookcases, dining-room tables, etc., quite unsuitable for my small home. I was bored and cold and wanted to go home and have a cup of tea. The auctioneer eventually reached the servants' quarters of the house ; most of the dealers were busy in an outhouse knocking out their "buys" in the ring while a few junk lots came up. I had not inspected any of these and had not the faintest idea of the goods they comprised. One lot was offered as a miscellaneous collection of china. The porter held up something that looked like a figure and I began bidding. The lot was knocked down to me for about two pounds and at the end of the sale I paid for it and took delivery. My first dip into the box was very unrewarding. What I had mistaken for a porcelain figure was one of a pair made of plaster of Paris. They were hideous and I was eventually lucky enough to get rid of them at another sale for five shillings. I next found a number of miniature frames which I was misguided enough to sell to a dealer on the spot for ten shillings. Next came a very charming French vase, beautifully gilded and painted with flowers, which I kept, then a foul collection of soap dishes without lids and disgusting tooth mugs and, finally, a small green vase. Now, I thought very little of this vase, but my wife liked it, so we took it home. The more we looked at this vase the more attached we became to it and eventually we gave it the place of honor on the mantelpiece in the living-room. One day a friend who is very knowledgeable paid us a visit. He went straight to the fireplace, picked up the vase and said, "Do you know what this is ?" "No," we replied. "We like it and we think it might be good, but we know nothing about it." "Well," he replied, "it's Ming celadon, probably seventeenth century. It's a very nice piece—I should like to own it myself." Of course, when it was explained to us we could see the beauty of the piece ; the perfect glaze, the unusual coloring and the exquisite proportions were the hall-marks of a craftsman. But it had been bought in a box of junk and adorned our house for two years before we finally realized what a treasure we possessed.

It is in their fragile porcelain, their delicate modelling and superb colorings and decorations that the Chinese excel. But the study of Chinese ceramics is essentially for the expert. The amateur should remember that only the coarser and stronger wares, generally speaking, were exported, owing to the danger of breakage in transport to the ports before railways were built. In any case the finest pieces were reserved for the Imperial palaces, the temples and the houses of great nobles—though some have leaked out in the form of loot after the Boxer Rising and other upheavals.

I would suggest that an interesting small collection can be made of early blue and white porcelain from the best of the English factories. There is a tendency today to regard this as being dull in comparison with the more ornate and colorful productions which were a feature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But much blue and white, particularly early soft paste, has a great deal to commend it. Purely from the aspect of display it looks well on an oak or mahogany dresser or sideboard. There are many different shades of blue and the decorative styles vary greatly, from early Worcester transfer printing to the Chinese method of painting under the glaze. Blue and white porcelain from Bow, Bristol, Plymouth and Longton Hall is rare and quite valuable. And there was a notable period when Dr. Wall was in charge of the Worcester factory which produced some fine blue and white which is highly prized by the connoisseur.

Even today the chance of picking up some of these early pieces is not to be discounted. But it must be soft paste. The best sources of odd pieces are, in my opinion, out-of-the-way junk shops and jumble sales. You will often find an odd plate or a cup and saucer or a dish mixed up with odds and ends of utility china. I once bought two Bristol dishes, clearly marked with the impressed Bristol cross, for threepence each at a jumble sale; and my magnificent Spode meat dish, carrying the mark of the founder of the factory, cost nothing. It was so heavy that I was asked if I would mind taking it away! I also have a tiny Worcester medicine measure, of the Dr. Wall period, and one or two other attractive pieces, all purchased for very little money. Coming to a somewhat later date there is a wonderful range of blue and white from the Spode factory—most of the

designs can be seen and studied in the standard book on Spode Blue and White. It is very interesting from my own viewpoint to note that my Spode dragon-pattern breakfast service, which carries a very early mark, is not even mentioned in this book.

The Chinese influence is very marked in this early ware and there are many variations of the Chinese dragon. I have one blue and white dish which is probably one of the earliest British copies of this oriental style of decoration. There is also the well-known Spode Italian pattern which is still in favour in modern productions from the Spode factory.

There are endless suggestions one can make when the beginner has become interested and is thinking seriously of getting together a small collection. There are the pretty pink lustre tea and coffee services, decorated with either ships or cottages, which are known as Sunderland lustre. Single cups and saucers may be bought at prices ranging from five shillings to one pound according to the locality and prestige of whatever antique shops you patronize and your own shrewdness as a bargainer. In sales-rooms the price varies, depending on the number of bidders. But you can have a lot of fun tracking down and matching cup with saucer, and so on, especially if, in your travels, you are lucky enough to find a teapot, jug or sugar basin, and one or two of the very handsome large Sunderland jugs. Your collection will increase in value as you expand it, an observation which applies to any collection.

I should explain here that the term Sunderland is really a generic one. Experts differ as to whether this particular pink lustre porcelain was made at the Sunderland factory or in other factories in different parts of the country. There were a number of factories in Sunderland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and it is agreed that some pink lustre was made in the area. As most manufacturers were somewhat unscrupulous in copying each other's work and as very little of this ware was marked there does exist some confusion. But as this pink lustre is very attractive and is certainly old, perhaps this doubt as to its antecedents does not greatly matter. One must, however, look out for forgeries. I once found a most pleasing small bowl in pink lustre with a transfer print in black, on the side, of the old almshouses of Winchester. When I picked it up

and examined the bottom there were the words, "Made in Germany."

So far I have browsed almost exclusively among the products of eighteenth-century factories. But the nineteenth century produced much fine porcelain and the wares produced at Swansea and Nantgarw call for special mention. These factories were operating for such a short time, comparatively speaking, the total period not being more than thirteen years, that the best specimens are becoming increasingly rare and correspondingly valuable. I was at a sale a year or two ago when part of a Swansea dessert service was sold for 850 guineas. What the whole of it would have fetched I can't think. This was a wonderful opportunity to see and handle rare porcelain of which I took full advantage, though I was a little astonished that such high prices were paid for the dessert service and other pieces, some of which were not in mint condition. Also, many of the decorations seemed to lack the delicacy and artistic merit of the eighteenth-century painters and decorators. Possibly one of the reasons for this is that the noted artist Billingsley, who had left Worcester for Wales, was by then reaching the end of his career and much of his greatest work was already behind him. However, as I have said, the extreme rarity of Swansea and Nantgarw porcelain now makes it valuable and there is no doubt that some of the smaller pieces are exquisitely painted and beautifully modelled. A little while ago a dealer friend bought from a private source a delightful trinket set about which he asked my advice. I had no hesitation in pronouncing that I thought it was Swansea, even though none of the pieces was marked, a conclusion with which he agreed.

Much of this ware, however, was marked, that of Swansea having a trident impressed on the base either with or without the word SWANSEA in capitals, and that of Nantgarw with either a painted or impressed NANTGARW sometimes with the addition of the letters C.W. (for china works) underneath.

Some of the nineteenth-century products of Coalport, Minton, Derby, Davenport, Copeland and Rockingham are extremely beautiful and are becoming much sought after, especially as the work of the early part of the century can now be classed as antique. Some of the teapots and jugs are most attractive both in design and decoration and there are even to be found occasionally

some late figures attributable to the Wood family of Burslem. There is, I believe, in a house in Fenton a complete mantelpiece in Ironstone china with moulded decoration on a yellow ground, which was made in the year 1815 in Mason's factory. Many people also are attracted by Rockingham frog mugs and tobys which are decorated with a very thick and treacly chocolate-brown glaze. The frog mugs have either one or two frogs inside, sometimes in a lighter colored brown glaze. I once bought one of these mugs at a sale, with a Chinese crackle-ware bowl, for four pounds ten shillings. Unfortunately the mug had a large crack from top to bottom which I had not observed. Even so I was able to sell it to a collector for five guineas, retaining the Chinese bowl, which, in my opinion is far superior as a decorative piece.

I must mention also the poor man's "gold and silver plate." When it was customary for rich families on special occasions to eat and drink from gold and silver vessels, the proletariat had to follow suit. Thus there were manufactured whole services coated in gold and silver lustre, and on gala occasions the hostess would proudly produce her "silver" or "gold" coffee or tea service. Some of the old silver lustre has become somewhat blackened with the passing years, but these examples of a bygone fashion are well worth collecting. The odd cup and saucer or milk jug can often be purchased quite cheaply.

As a final word I must emphasize that the connoisseur of old pottery and porcelain is not made in a day. The quest for old china is a fascinating one, but in few things pertaining to the fine arts is a little knowledge more dangerous. There are many pitfalls to be avoided and the amateur is likely to fall into every skilful trap baited for him by the clever forgers of the past. I must admit that I have fallen into most of them and shall undoubtedly pitch headlong into a few more. I once bought a jug which I was absolutely sure was Swansea. I was nearly bursting with pride when I brought it home, particularly as I had given only a few shillings for it. It had all the characteristics of the best period of the Swansea factory—the shape, the flower decorations, even a twisted vine-leaf handle. I took it to my friend in Hampstead, who informed me sorrowfully that it was a copy made by one of the famous nineteenth-century forgers. My advice therefore to the amateur and especially to those who

cannot afford to waste their money is to combine patient study of books and authentic pieces with their search for treasures.

There is always something new to discover about antique china. Not long ago I found that the early Staffordshire factories exported a considerable amount of ware to America. The interesting point is that this was mostly decorated with American scenes copied from contemporary prints. The china was nearly always blue and white, or else pink and white, and is now much sought after by American collectors. I doubt if much of it is to be found today in England in private hands, but dishes and plates are articles which might easily lie around in attics and kitchens for years without being noticed as being out of the ordinary. The fortunate possessor of one of these pieces might easily mistake it for something of less worth, particularly as the border decorations of white daisies with a white scroll around the edge are exactly similar to those on the ware decorated for the English market. So if you do have a piece decorated with an American scene, the chances are that it is a collector's piece and is valuable. I should add that I have spent hours and even days peering at blue and white dishes in junk shops in the hope that I might come across one of these rarities. So far I have not been successful—but I have learned a lot about the style of decoration on blue and white china.





## CHAPTER FOUR

### FURNITURE

IN my younger days, leaving home at an early age to seek fame and fortune and achieving neither, I lived in a constant succession of rooms in London euphemistically described on advertisement cards as bed-sitting rooms. The description was technically correct in that they did contain a bed and a chair, of sorts. But when I look back on those dreary horrors, rooms without personality, charm or any of the comforts of a civilized existence, I remember vowing that one day I would live in a home of my own, surrounded by furniture which gave me pleasure to look at and to use, and which would wipe out the memory of the ugliness then about me.

One of the blacker episodes in a varied and eventful life was touring with a theatrical company as business manager, press representative and understudy to the male lead—and for the benefit of any stage-struck readers I will add that the salary was barely enough to keep body and soul together, let alone provide any margin for a gay life. The tour began in a university town where I took a lodging near the theatre. The landlady either had a bamboo and linoleum complex, or else she was the widow of some eastern official, I never knew which. Anyway, all the furniture in my room, except the bed, was made of bamboo and the floor was covered with the chilliest linoleum known to man. The bed was the hardest and the room the coldest in my experience. In sympathy with the general shininess and chilliness of the room, the bed had insufficient

bedclothes and a glazed counterpane which always slid off during the night on to the floor. It was all very clean and highly polished and the outcome of all this antiseptic *décor* was that I developed a terrible stiff neck, caused, no doubt, by lying hunched up in bed, and a large boil. The next week, when we arrived in Edinburgh, I parked myself in a very cosy small hotel where I had a wonderful bedroom with a private bathroom, two hot water bottles in my bed at night, mountains of blankets, and breakfast brought to me by a wee Scots chambermaid—all for nine shillings and sixpence per day. I have therefore the tenderest memories of the City of Edinburgh and its charming inhabitants.

My point is that a home is intended to be lived in and therefore its furnishings are of the greatest importance. Comfortable beds, good restful arm-chairs, tables and furniture which are good to look at, as well as being functional, are absolute essentials. It is also comparatively simple to combine all of these requisites with a love for old and antique furniture (there is a distinction between these two words—an antique is an article over one hundred years old) and beautiful furnishings. Even where there are young children it is not always necessary to fill the house with rubbish. A friend of mine who lives in a sixteenth-century farmhouse in Surrey has three young and lusty children. But her home is attractively furnished—mostly with antiques—which the children have been taught to respect.

I cannot understand why so many people today are content to surround themselves with high-priced rubbish poured out by firms who specialize in installment selling. It is not cheap—the furniture is made mainly from unseasoned pine or of plywood with cheap veneers and sticky varnishes and polishes to cover up the defects. And the convention that every home must have a three-piece suite and a dining-room set is a tribute only to the influence and persuasiveness of the advertising agent.

At any salesroom it is possible to buy good furniture at a fraction of the cost of new. Even the worst Victorian furniture was made by craftsmen who took a pride in their work. But I have often heard young couples say, "Oh, I couldn't fancy anything second-hand." Everything in the way of antiques is second-hand. The world's great works of art are second-, third-, fourth- and hundredth-hand.

When my wife and I began to furnish our Dorset home we started from scratch. Our ideas were elastic and we simply wanted good pieces of any period which would fit in with each other and which did not have that uncomfortable self-consciousness typical of furniture in the wrong surroundings. There was no point in our trying to cram a huge Chippendale breakfront bookcase into our living-room when we only had a ceiling height of seven feet. Neither could we have a four-poster bed (the one Queen Elizabeth *didn't* sleep in) which we had been offered for our bedroom. Or a gigantic double wardrobe. As a matter of fact we haven't got a wardrobe at all—yet. We improvised a hanging cupboard which does as well. We did not want an oak room with Gothic, Tudor and Jacobean pieces; another room with nothing but Queen Anne walnut; a Georgian mahogany dining-room or an Empire living-room. We wanted furniture of all ages and styles which would mix happily together.

Now, the finding of pieces of antique furniture presents a good many snags for the amateur. Often a piece which has every appearance of being "right" is a clever forgery. There are so many things one has to know, and an additional hazard is that restorers often have to use as much ingenuity and craftsmanship as the original cabinetmakers. Personally I do not mind very much if a piece is not absolutely as it was originally, so long as its character and function have not been destroyed. There are, however, certain basic facts which are worth remembering. Oak was used up to about the middle of the seventeenth century. For the next sixty years the wood used was mainly walnut, and the eighteenth century was the period for mahogany, satinwood and some of the more unusual woods such as tulip wood. Mahogany was, of course, extensively used during the nineteenth century.

Knowledge of styles and designs of the various periods can only be acquired by carefully studying the standard works on period furniture and by examining pieces displayed in museums and private collections. And one's own curiosity and thirst for knowledge is often stimulated by references to furniture in old books and plays. For instance, in the wooing scene in Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, there are many references to a "joint stool." I played in this particular scene at a Shakespeare Festival one year and was most intrigued about this particular item of furniture. So I looked into its history. I discovered

that it was a "joined or joyned stool" and that it was the forerunner of the chair as we know it today. It had to be very strong to support knights in armor and other weighty characters. An early joined stool was therefore strongly constructed, the legs widening outwards to the bottom with the stretchers, which went all round the stool, being only a couple of inches from the floor.

As our modern chair developed from the joined stool, the table and the sideboard had equally utilitarian antecedents. The first tables were simply rough boards which were brought into the dining-halls and placed on trestles. The sideboard began as a second trestle table which was used for carving, then later became a sort of huge chest, a court cupboard and the elegant sideboards made by Chippendale and Sheraton.

Today we speak of an important person "taking the chair" at a meeting. This convention, and the office of chairman, dates from the days when there were perhaps only one or two chairs in a household and the most important person present was offered "the chair."

Very little of this early oak furniture is found outside museums, private collections, churches and other ecclesiastical establishments and, in any case, ornately carved and heavy oak furniture is not really suited to modern homes. The exception is probably the ancient dower chest, or coffer, which is eminently suited to most modern halls as a repository for rubbers or boots, golf clubs and unwanted magazines. We have a fine example dated 1677, lined with ancient newspapers and with nearly all its original carving. It looks magnificent on the flagstones of the hall against the plain white walls and is the right piece of furniture in the right place. And an example of a piece in the wrong place is in the home of a friend in the village. She has a handsome court cupboard which is quite unsuited to her small cottage. It almost blocks the entrance to her kitchen and whenever I go to see her I nearly always catch myself a smart blow on one or another of its sharp projections.

Early oak tables, such as the massive refectories, handsome as some of them are, are difficult to move except with the aid of a crane or several stout manservants. These tables do need a large room and are better displayed in the dining-halls of schools, universities, clubs and societies than in modern private homes. We wanted a refectory table, but not a modern one or something

which weighed half a ton. So we had one made, from a medieval design, of driftwood, oak planks and pieces of teak and walnut which we carried up the cliff and stored away until we were able to use it.

The gate-legged table dates from about the middle of the seventeenth century and is still manufactured today. The early gate-legs were in oak and they were made later in walnut and mahogany. They came in many sizes, from the very large which would seat six to eight people to the very tiny which were probably made for the nursery. One can conjure up a delightful mental picture of a small girl, seated at one of these little tables, gravely perusing an ancient lesson book or playing with her doll's tea service. There are, of course, modern reproductions of these tables. But the old ones were never stained or varnished as they are today. They developed over the years, with assiduous polishing by generations of parlormaids, the lovely patina which carries its own credentials of antiquity.

The best antique furniture was made for the rich families of the times. Large town houses and huge country mansions had to be furnished in fitting style and we find as a consequence that many of the larger pieces are not at all suitable for modern homes. But there are many small pieces of all periods which are suitable both in size and style, and which will still leave room for your favorite arm-chair. And here again you must not be carried away by enthusiasm for something simply because it is old. Our fine wing arm-chair was a case in point. When we spotted it at a country sale we coveted it as we have seldom coveted anything before or since. It was very old, but in excellent condition, enormously capacious and covered in damask velvet of a crimson so rich that it glowed like old burgundy. A magnificent chair. I pictured myself with pipe and book, cosily tucked into it throughout the long winter evenings to come, its high back and wings shielding me from draughts when the sou'-wester roared up the Channel in the winter gales.

When the chair came up my wife and I were outbid and we left the sale feeling bitterly disappointed. However, about a month later while re-visiting the same salesroom we saw to our amazement that the chair was stowed in a shed. On making inquiries we learned that it had not been collected or paid for by the man who had bought it, and if we cared to repeat our

own bid the chair was ours. Needless to say we did not lose this second chance, and the same afternoon the chair was safely in our drawing-room. Disillusion speedily set in. To begin with, though it looked impressively handsome, it dwarfed everything else in the room and made our low ceiling look even lower. Its big wing sides kept out draughts but they also kept out the light. Worst of all, it was uncomfortable. The seat was made in the old way with horsehair padding over the framework. No springs, no soft thick cushions such as we are accustomed to in our day. I took off the sackings underneath the seat and tried re-arranging the lumpy filling but this only seemed to make matters worse. So it had to go. And now I have a deep, low, soft modern arm-chair made about thirty years ago in which I can fall asleep at the drop of a hat.<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say that *all* old chairs are hard to sit on. Most of the Georgian ones, especially the dining chairs, are extremely well designed for their function—e.g., to enable one to sit upright and enjoy a leisurely meal. They are comfortable, aesthetically pleasing and made by craftsmen from the finest woods. And most of them are of a size and shape which will harmonize with a modern setting. If you can't afford a set, remember that the possession of even one or two genuinely old chairs confers distinction on your living-room. Odd chairs can be purchased much more cheaply than sets. We have a handsome one of the Chippendale style and period which we picked up for three and sixpence. There was very little wrong with it and it even, so far as we could tell, still retained its original seat covering. And there is always the possibility that you may be able to match your chairs and thus collect a complete set.

It is interesting and well worth while studying the designs of eighteenth-century chairs—which vary considerably. One naturally thinks first of all of Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Adam and Sheraton, the influence of their designs being apparent to the present day. There were, of course, other and less well-known cabinetmakers whose work was probably as good as that of their better known colleagues.

Chippendale and the other designers gave their names to furniture styles and a Chippendale chair means simply that it is

<sup>1</sup> Plate 3 (facing p. 88) was taken while we still had the old one. You can see it on the left in its summer slip-cover.

made in that style. The chairs, in addition to being beautifully carved, were extremely practical and strong, easily able to support the weight of a solid Georgian trencherman. Hepplewhite and Sheraton styles were more fragile, Sheraton, particularly, using satinwood with either wood inlays or painted decorations.

Robert Adam was not a cabinetmaker—he was primarily an architect and the eighteenth century owes much to his classical designs for furniture, silver and porcelain and architecture generally. He thought in terms of huge mantelpieces, fireplaces and cornices, decorated with wreaths, draperies and urns etc. Consequently his chair designs are not as well known or as attractive domestically as those of his colleagues. All of these craftsmen published books of designs which became, as it were, standard reference works. There was no question of designs being patented, although I believe this might have been done in particular cases, and there was nothing to prevent anyone who had the necessary skill from copying the designs of other craftsmen.

Slat or ladderback chairs in elm are very comfortable and pleasing to look at, as are also some of the lovely old Windsor chairs with their graceful backs following the natural curve of the body. There are many varieties of these, including a kitchen rocker, and one fitted as a writing chair.

Old settees and sofas were designed for the clothing of the period, when gentlemen wore tight trousers and sat up straight instead of lounging about, and the ladies were stiffly corseted under their voluminous skirts. And although there is a modern tendency to despise Victorian furniture, some of the early Victorian settees are very attractive, being nearer to the lightness and elegance of the Regency. Re-covered in suitable fabrics they can be a charming addition to any room—very often a bedroom. For all our modern ideas, I think the old designers were cleverer in utilizing living space. How charming and useful are the old angle chairs, corner seats and “love seats” and the day bed or chaise longue, which never looked out of place and served several purposes. We have a most unusual settee. It was probably specially made and is built with a curved back and seat. We bought it very cheaply at a sale and eventually the covering wore out. We had various estimates from

upholsterers for its re-covering and we were quoted prices in the neighborhood of thirty pounds. So we decided to do it ourselves. My wife, who is most ingenious, had among her collection of patchwork pieces some strips of brocade about thirty feet long by four inches wide. She cut and machined these strips into pieces of material seven feet by about three feet, at the same time matching the intricate pattern. My job was to remove the old covering in sections, and I had the strictest instructions not to tear the fabric more than I could help. I also had to take out the innumerable tin tacks and pins which fastened the old covering to the framework of the settee.

Eventually we had the settee stripped ready for the new covering, cut from the pattern of the old, to be put in place. And in this connection it was most interesting to notice how well the maker of this piece of furniture had done his job. Wadding was laid over the horsehair stuffing and over this was the finest and softest cotton-wool. It was a foundation well worth the compliment of its new covering.

When we finished the job we were very proud of ourselves. The settee looked magnificent—as though it had just been delivered wrapped in cellophane. It took us four days to do and cost a few shillings for gimp pins, upholsterers' tacks and one or two sundries. So, never be afraid of buying a shabby old chair or settee so long as it has a sound framework. Even button-holing isn't as difficult as it looks and padding is a simple matter to replace. You will be more than compensated for your trouble, if you do it yourself, by the great saving in cost.

Small tables are perhaps the most valued of all furnishings today because, apart from their attractiveness, they will fit into almost any room. The Georgian period produced many charming examples and probably one of the main reasons was the vogue for tea drinking among the ladies of the eighteenth century. There is an admirable description of one of these tea parties by Mrs. Gaskell in *Cranford*.

One of the earliest and most useful of these tables was known as a Pembroke table. It was sometime oval but more usually either square or rectangular with cabriole or tapering legs. It had two flaps supported by brackets and either one or two drawers at the end. The handles were round with rings to hold by.

There were several varieties of snap-top tables, the top being

fixed by a bolt or pin which, when removed, allowed the table top to be tilted and the table placed against the wall. There were pie-crust and dish-top tables. The dish-top had a plain turned-over edge, and the pie-crust an edge very similar to the decoration on a steak and kidney pie. An old-time steak and kidney pie, that is, when the cook realized the importance of proper decoration as a visual aid to good digestion.

These tables are not easy to find today. In fact, Georgian and Regency furniture has become so popular in recent years that the smaller pieces fetch comparatively high prices. But if you are not too fussy you will occasionally find a small table which may need some restoring but will not cost much money.

There is also a wonderful range of card tables, often made of satinwood inlaid with mahogany, games tables and, of course, work tables. Our ancestresses were most industrious and no bride dared to face the future without her own work table. These are very beautiful and make lovely presents for modern brides.

We have been looking for a long time for a corner cupboard for use in the hall. But it has to be the right size—just over six feet from top to bottom. Most of those we have seen are either too big or too small. So we have had to improvise. A friend has presented us with an oak panel of an age to match our hall chest. In actual fact it is probably much earlier and may even be Elizabethan. We have instructed our local carpenter to find some old oak to make a frame and we are hoping that the result will be a cupboard of the exact size and proportions we require. To make room for it we shall have to sell an old Welsh spinning-wheel, but as our attempts at spinning have not been very successful we do not mind parting with a decorative but useless piece of furniture to make way for something which has a most necessary function.

If one is patient it is remarkable how the piece of furniture one wants turns up after a time. We had a great fancy to own a butler's tray, one of those small but very useful articles common to the Georgian household. Each time we saw one at a sale it was either in bad condition or fetched more money than we wanted to pay. But we were staying recently in a friend's house in Surrey. She had recently converted a barn into a studio and had furnished it from bits and pieces she had found stored away in her cellar. One of these bits was a handsome butler's

tray on which she kept her paint pots. But she didn't have a really comfortable chair on which to sit and do her painting. So we exchanged an antique elm slat-back chair, superfluous to our own requirements, for the butler's tray. Result—mutual satisfaction.

The next thing we shall look out for is a dumb-waiter. I have in mind one of a particular Georgian design, made in mahogany and comprising three circular tables graduating in size and transfixied by a central pillar. These tables are sometimes made to revolve, in order that guests should not be inconvenienced by having to reach for some delicacy on the farther side.

Another piece of furniture which gives us constant pleasure is a *bijouterie*. This is a small showcase for the display of tiny things which are overlooked when scattered about a room but make an enchanting show when gathered together in one place. The best examples of this item of furniture were made in France, as the name implies, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in typical rococo style. Ours is of later date and comparatively plain, but its shape is most pleasing, as you can see in the picture of the living-room, Plate 3. It holds a Battersea enamel box with a particularly fine painting on the lid, of the *Castel dell' Ovo* in Naples harbor; a Sèvres etui, several early English scent bottles, a tiny pin-cushion made of carved ivory like a chess piece, a fortune teller's crystal, a paperweight, a silver caddy spoon, some glyptics (carvings on agate, sardonyx and chalcedony), a silver police whistle (with siren effect), one or two miniatures, a little model of a guitar in tortoiseshell and ivory, and my wife's great-grandmother's wedding ring.

We are still searching for one or two pieces of furniture to complete our living-room. As a matter of fact we have made several changes since we came here six years ago. Some of the original photographs which were taken for my wife's book about our cottages show several items which I had almost forgotten. But our main requirement is a really pretty and useful small sideboard—preferably Sheraton. We have managed for some time with a Victorian chiffonier—or rather the bottom half of it, which is really a very useful and not unattractive piece—being plain and simple in design and having plenty of room inside to hold glasses and bottles. We once thought we had found exactly what we wanted. It was an old clavichord in an

inlaid satinwood case and with the original keyboard. It came up at a local sale and no one made a bid for it. So we bought it for seven and sixpence. One of the legs was broken and we had some difficulty getting it into our car. But when we got it home it was just too long and too wide to fit easily into the section of wall reserved for it. Had it fitted we should have taken out the interior and used it as a sideboard. But it was no good—it wouldn't go in and we gave it away to a friend who had a Georgian flat near Baker Street. So we still have our piece of Victoriana.

Our dining-room chairs are a set of six early Victorian chairs in walnut, with oval backs and rather delicate curved legs. We bought the set for a pound. The upholstery—or rather the covering—was very shabby, but a search in our box of patch-work materials brought to light sufficient colorful pieces to make a harlequin set of seat covers.

My desk is not the one I hope I shall eventually own. Naturally I had dreamed of something beautiful in walnut or mahogany at which generations of country squires had either pored over estate papers or fallen asleep in a padded arm-chair over the remains of their second bottle of port. But anything even remotely resembling a desk of this kind was fetching a high price at the time we were furnishing and we had to content ourselves with one considerably less attractive. In fact, it looked pretty awful. Its only advantage was that it had plenty of deep drawers to contain all my unsold manuscripts and was very cheap. Whatever wood it was made of was coated with horrible dark brown paint and varnish which resisted the onslaughts of even the most potent of paint strippers. At last I resolved to take drastic measures. I sharpened my plane to a keen edge and planed off all the disgusting stuff down to the original surface. And I must confess that I had a most agreeable surprise at the completion of my labors. The desk, although no showpiece, was extremely well made of golden pine, and the grain of the wood is now exposed in some attractive patterns. I polished it with a clear wax polish, stuck on a new leather top and it does not look at all bad.

If you have a large house or a flat with good sized rooms you can have a lot of fun finding the furniture you want. Our enthusiasm has communicated itself to many of our friends.

We are all very proud of our finds and when we meet our first question, after the formal courtesies, is usually, "What's new?" —meaning, "What's new in your house?"

One of my oldest friends, whom I knew when he was a medical student, is a keen collector and always asking my opinion on some dubious piece which he has picked up in a little shop he has "discovered" in a back street. The trouble is that he never asks me about it until it is too late—e.g., until he has actually bought it. At first I used to be kind to him and say, after one look at the faked mark or the artificial wormholes, "I'm not particularly knowledgeable on this period. You may have got a bargain." But now I think a bit of cruelty would be kinder, so I tell him the truth. He is always wounded to the soul to think that anyone would want to take advantage of his innocence. But there it is. He is the antique merchant's dispensation from providence—will believe anything he is told, fall for any old guff and never take the trouble to try and learn something about the subject for himself. His very nice flat is cluttered up with his "finds" and his "bargains," not one of which is worth the place it fills. In the place of honor on his mantelpiece stands a pair of urn-shaped vases with lids which he jubilantly informed me were Dresden, turning one upside down so that I could see the mark on the bottom. I forbore to tell him, then, that it had been overpainted on the glaze and was an obvious forgery.

Attractive and useful things to pick up when you get the chance are the smaller appurtenances of Georgian households—knife boxes, wine coolers, cake stands, cheese coasters and particularly tea caddies. Old caddies were often made of rose-wood or satinwood beautifully inlaid. The interior was lined with either red satin or velvet and contained fitted boxes to hold black and green tea and, in the center, a cut glass mixing bowl. The caddy had a lock and key, the reason for this being that in the days of Queen Anne tea was very much more expensive than it is today. It was therefore used sparingly and the caddy locked up after use.

It is still possible to find these caddies, although the earlier examples are becoming scarce, especially those which were attributed to either Chippendale or Sheraton. And it is only rarely that one can find a specimen with the fittings intact. These have mostly been removed and the caddies used as

repositories for love letters and other precious documents. I bought one myself quite recently for seventeen and sixpence. But it was not as old as I believed it and not therefore such a bargain as I thought in my initial enthusiasm. I was in one of those phases, which occur in the lives of most addicts, when I had a mild attack of sale fever and was bringing home all sorts of things which I had only the haziest recollection of acquiring. Extraordinary things, of which I afterwards bitterly repented. There was a time when my wife was terrified of my going to a sale, when her farewell kiss was accompanied by a despairing wail of "Please *don't* buy any rubbish!" And sometimes when I was tempted to throw in a winning bid for some fantastically useless object, the echo of this heart-cry would recur in the nick of time to save me.

Looking-glasses, which should be decorative as well as functional, are important, and antique mirrors range from the very plain to the ornate girandole, usually decorated with an eagle, a winged horse or dragon. The old cabinetmakers made many attractive frames, those of Chippendale and Adam being carved, while Sheraton's were inlaid with lighter colored woods or painted with flower designs.

As a general rule it is safe to assume that good antique furniture will not lose its value. The pieces one buys can be regarded as investments and, although it sounds like boasting, I can say that we have not bought anything which we could not sell at a profit. One reason for this happy state of affairs is that we cannot afford to pay fancy prices and we have to wait until the piece we want turns up at a sale, as it invariably does.

Many people are restrained by convention from experimenting with their furniture. They *must* have a modern bedroom suite which cannot be bought for much less than fifty pounds. But the furniture one requires for a bedroom can be got for much less than this and every piece can be old and good to look at. I would exclude from this generalization that very necessary article—the bed. It is important that this should be comfortable, and old beds which lack the refinement of the inner spring mattress can be infernally hard.

There is a variety of antique bedroom furnishings which are not expensive and which add character and charm to sleeping quarters. Handsome Georgian and Victorian chests are not hard

to come by—we bought one Georgian chest for five pounds ten and another of a later date for three pounds. Fine, elegant dressing-tables can be made from old writing-tables which have one or two drawers, with the top embellished by one of the delightful eighteenth-century toilet mirrors, and perhaps a piano stool, one of the revolving kind, for a seat. And beautiful early Victorian ladies' and gentlemen's wardrobes in mahogany, with bags of room for everything, can frequently be found cheaply at sales, as can commodes, small tables and chairs, particularly some of the early nursing chairs and the prettier Victorian arm-chairs.

Elegant little whatnots are useful items, and small bookcases can be fitted with curtain runners and used for housing shoes or toilet bottles. Even small upright chairs made of bamboo are now becoming fashionable for bedrooms and nurseries. And you may even own an antique "bedroom utensil." We have a genuine Georgian one—my friend Tanner gave it to me for a house-warming present—and it has bawdy pictures painted on the bottom, inside and out.

I have purposely refrained from mentioning French furniture. For one thing I know very little about it and for another it does not mix happily with British furniture. It needs its own environment to be really worth collecting. The ornate gilt and *petit point* of the French periods is a specialized taste.

I once bought a Louis Seize fauteuil for a speculation. It came up in a local salesroom and looked so lovely in the middle of a gloomy group of leather sofas and sagging arm-chairs that I could not resist buying it. The price was four pounds ten shillings. When we got it home we did not know what to do with it. The chair, beautiful as it was, looked out of place in our living-room as it needed other furniture of its period to go with it. We tried it in various other rooms but there seemed to be no place in the house where it did not stand out like a sore thumb. However, I was convinced that it was a valuable piece of furniture. So on our next trip to London we packed the chair into our car with several other items we had for disposal.

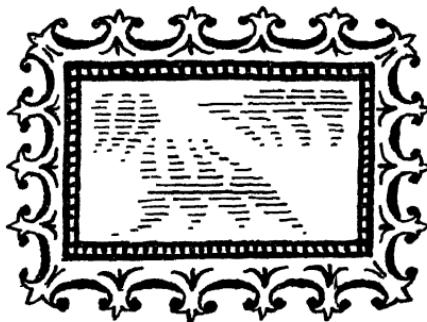
First of all we took it to a famous dealer in French furniture, an authority in Bond Street. He said it was an undoubted fake and he wouldn't have it as a gift. By this time it was nearing midday and we were a little conspicuous standing on the pavement in Bond Street moodily surveying our large gilt chair.

So I finally lifted it on to my head and marched up Bond Street—with my wife trailing behind carrying my hat and umbrella—to the offices of a well-known salesroom. This firm did not think much of the chair either, but agreed to sell it, advising us to set a bottom price of eight pounds.

The sequel is that the chair fetched exactly eight pounds. I still don't know if it was real or a fake. It looked identical to other chairs of the period with red lacquer showing through the worn gilt and an exquisite tapestry covering the back and seat. If it was genuine, somebody had a bargain—if it was a fake, then we had just about cleared ourselves, taking into account the auctioneers' commission and the cost of cab fares. But I am still puzzled as to why the chair made exactly the bottom price. I should have attended the sale and prodded the bidding along; but it would not have been worth my while to make a special trip to town for this purpose and it did not occur to me to ask one of my London friends to represent me. I believe now that I was "taken for a ride."

It was my first and only experiment in dealing in French furniture and likely to be my last. I admire it in its proper setting but have no more ambition to buy any.





## CHAPTER FIVE

### SILVER AND SILVER PLATE

**O**NE of the problems with which the amateur collector is confronted is that of making up his mind what to collect. I remember that when I first began to take an interest in old things I was like a magpie. I wanted everything, no matter what its age, condition or value. The mere sight of an antique shop was enough to stop me in my tracks and I would stay with my face glued to the window for what usually seemed like hours to my bored companion. I did not then realize that most of the goods I was looking at so enviously were the flotsam of the antique trade which may be seen in any shop from Land's End to John o' Groats. The customers the proprietors are looking for are those who provide the bread and butter of the trade. In other words, amateurs like myself to whom the word "antique" spells something indescribably old and beautiful. This is not to say that many of these goods are not worth having. Some of them undoubtedly are—but only if you really want them and if they will form part of your collection. There is little point in haphazard buying, unless you are gathering together examples of things produced in a particular age—such as that of Queen Victoria. Victoriana has its devotees and a complete room of the period down to the antimacassars, the wallpaper, Turkey carpet, the musical box and the whatnot full of knick-knacks is not without a good deal of faded charm. A famous actress of the London stage has a

bedroom of this kind and even wears Victorian-style nightgowns with long sleeves and high frilled necks to complete the effect.

You do, eventually, have to make up your mind as to what you are going to collect and your reasons for so doing. Most of us are mercenary ; there are few people who collect simply for love of beautiful objects, and as beauty is only in the eye of the beholder it does not always follow that artistic worth and intrinsic value go hand in hand.

When we come to silver we are dealing with a commodity which has an essential value in cash regardless of any other considerations. Silver, like gold, can be melted down and the precious metal sold at the current bullion price. That is one of the reasons why so little silver of the Stuart period is to be found today. The supporters of King Charles melted down their silver plate to help finance the King, as Cromwell was in possession of the Mint.

There are dealers who do nothing else except tour the country buying up scrap silver—such as watch cases, brooches and buckles, photo frames, dish covers and toilet articles—which is broken up and melted down. And a very paying proposition it is too, I believe, especially since they often pick up some nice old piece which they can sell to an antiquarian for considerably more than its value as metal. It is surprising how many people who should know better allow valuable articles to slip out of their hand for small sums, simply because they have not taken the trouble to find out something about them or are more interested in immediate cash with which to purchase some trifle which they must have at once. And in this connection I should warn you against the activities of the gentleman who is known in the trade as a “knocker.” He is a character who has no particular premises beyond a yard or perhaps a back room and he obtains his goods by knocking at the doors of likely houses or cottages and inquiring if the occupant has anything to sell. He has eyes like X-rays and once he is admitted nothing is safe —however well it may be hidden. His main objective is to get inside the house. Once there, he is sure that his patter and general sales-talk will get him what he wants. He is by no means averse to offering a high price for something which you know is worthless, providing he can get what he really wants at his own figure. And he is an expert at his job—he has to

be. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that he will charm out of you your beautiful old silver teapot at a ridiculous price on the grounds that it is either a fake or is only worth the silver it is made of, and he will have it in his van and be a mile away before you realize that you have been swindled. So, beware of the "knocker" and never, never let him get his foot inside your door. If he does, the odds are a hundred to one that you will come off worst.

With my own small collection of antiques I have usually been more concerned with identification than with value. This is not to say that I am indifferent to money. On the contrary, I am delighted when I discover that an article I have bought for sixpence is worth as many pounds. But I do not want to buy and sell purely for the sake of dealing. If I sell an article it is only because I want something else even more and that is the only way in which I can get it. I take the viewpoint that money is useful only for what it will buy and the lack of it has never worried me unduly. I get more pleasure from looking at a lovely piece of silver or porcelain or a fine piece of furniture than I do from examining a handful of pound notes or an entry in a bankbook. I have to earn money the hard way, which for me is by sitting down at a typewriter and flogging my brain into a creative spell, when I would much rather be attending a sale or mowing the lawn or merely walking over the hills. I am certain, also, that I should be a very unsuccessful dealer for the reason that I should find it most difficult to part with anything I like.

Silver and silver plate are in some respects easier to identify than other antiques. That blackened spoon dug up in the vegetable garden of the house into which you have just moved, or which you have raked out of a dirty old box in a junk shop, may be an old silver one—or an aluminum horror, once chained to a counter, and the former property of British Railways or the Automat. Whatever it is you will not be long in doubt, while it might take you years and a great deal of research to discover whether the piece of yellow porcelain which has been in your family ever since you can remember is an Imperial Yellow Ming bowl or a clever copy sold in a Canton market to an unwary tourist.

My own experiences with silver and plate have followed the

usual course of those who endeavor to buy good things without much money to spare. I have had some successes and many failures. I have made horrible errors because, in the beginning, I regarded every goose as a swan. Thus, whenever I spotted an ornate Britannia-metal teapot at a sale I immediately jumped to the conclusion that it was Sheffield plate and had to be forcibly restrained from buying it. I did buy one once when my wife wasn't looking, and quite thought I had made a valuable find at the cost of a few shillings, which I owed to my superlative instinct for recognizing treasures which everyone else thought to be junk. Being obstinate, it took a long time before I could be persuaded that it wasn't a good piece, even though the evidence was right under my nose. However, I learned a good deal about Sheffield plate in the course of it ; and as I afterwards sold the teapot at a profit, albeit only a small one, it could be said that I gained my knowledge cheaply, and I suppose I did have the moral satisfaction of feeling that I was not quite such a fool as I appeared to be.

The amateur collector of silver is not likely to bother much with enormous pieces of antique silver plate and giant candelabra which, in any event, are more suited to exclusive clubs, Masonic lodges, colleges and other institutions which have to put on a show. Unless, of course, he can buy them cheaply and immediately resell them at a nice profit. It is very unlikely that treasures such as these if sold publicly will escape the ferret eye of the dealer. But there are innumerable small items which can be bought at a reasonable price, especially if you are willing to learn something about silver marks and designs and do not buy the first thing you see at the price asked. You should remember, if you are buying in a shop, that there are usually two prices—one for the trade and another for the private customer. Therefore you must learn to haggle and at the end of a long and probably exhausting discussion the shopkeeper will probably say, “ All right, you can have it for so-and-so. But I shan't be making a penny profit.” Do not feel, in this case, that you are robbing the poor. The profit has perhaps been reduced by a modest ten per cent.

Among the small items I would suggest for collection are the many varieties of spoons, particularly tea-caddy spoons which were made in a number of attractive shapes ; snuff-boxes, vinaigrettes, pomanders, candlesticks and, if you can find them,

tea and coffee pots, milk jugs and basins and sugar tongs. A collection of silver snuff-boxes, for instance, would undoubtedly increase in value as the years went by.

The main qualifications for those interested in collecting antique silver are patience, good taste and a powerful magnifying glass—either a jeweler's glass, which can be held in the eye socket like a monocle, leaving the hands free, or a small folding double magnifier. I have found these simple and inexpensive adjuncts invaluable—particularly when I have been at sales where the light has been poor, owing to the electricity having been cut off when the occupiers departed. They are useful not only for examining silver marks but also for identifying marks on porcelain, signatures on prints and pictures and, in fact, on all occasions when the naked eye is unable to pick up minute details.

So far as British silver is concerned the amateur can rest assured that antique silver always carries a mark, and you can be certain that a piece which is not marked has its origin anywhere except in Great Britain. There are, of course, some pieces which have seen much use, in which case the mark may have partly worn off. But it will probably not have vanished altogether and you will no doubt be able to pick out part of it with the aid of a strong glass. But try not to regard a scratch on the bottom of the piece as an early mark.

A knowledge of silver marks is not hard to come by. Sheets of date letters can be acquired easily enough and almost any work on the history of silver will give you the standard marks and other means of identification. The long history of silver markings is extremely interesting and, like the study of any branch of antiques, one learns a great deal of history in the process.

Taking matters in chronological order, the origins of the Goldsmiths' Company go back to the reign of Edward III. In 1327 letters patent were granted to "The Wardens and Commonalty of the Mystery of Goldsmiths of the City of London." Ten years later a Charter was granted which directed that all goldsmiths and silversmiths in London were to trade in Cheapside, excepting those in the King's Exchange in the City of London, and that all provincial smiths should come to London "for the stamping of their wares with the leopard's head thereon," with various other enactments. Very strong powers were given to

the Company and to the Mayor and Sheriffs of London to enforce these rules. New Charters were also granted by Richard II, Edward IV, James I and Charles II, the general effect of these being to make the Company a corporation with perpetual succession and giving it extensive powers of supervision over all cities, boroughs and towns in England.

In 1478, in the reign of Edward IV, the alphabetical system of marks was initiated by the Goldsmiths' Company. These marks, combined with the standard marks of London and the provincial cities, have stood the test of time and fully satisfy the requirements of the present day. In fact, this system seems to have been one of the good things which emerged from the troubled years of the Wars of the Roses.

London hall-marks from 1300 to the present day may be summarized as follows :

The leopard's head, crowned, from 1300.

The maker's mark, from 1363.

The annual date letter, from 1478.

The lion passant, from 1545.

The lion's head erased and Britannia substituted, 1697 to 1720.

The sovereign's head, 1784 to 1890, George III, George IV and William IV looked right, and Queen Victoria looked left.

The leopard's head uncrowned, from 1823.

Important provincial centers have their own hall-marks. That of Edinburgh is a triple-turreted castle or tower and the standard mark is a thistle. Glasgow has an odd emblem—a tree with a bird on top with a bell hanging from one branch and a fish across the trunk. The standard mark is a lion rampant instead of the lion passant of the City of London. The Sheffield and Birmingham marks are a crown and an anchor respectively; Chester, three wheatsheaves and a dagger; and Dublin, a figure of Hibernia seated on a harp holding a palm branch with the face in profile.

Antique silver of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries should therefore show four marks and, from 1784, when the sovereign's head was added, five marks until 1890.

The London alphabetical year marks run in cycles of twenty years from 1696 to 1855, each alphabet stopping at the letter U.

Each cycle commences with the figure 6 at the end of the date. Details are as follows :

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 1686 to 1715. | Letters in old court hand in five-sided shield.           |
| 1716 to 1735. | Letters in old Roman capitals in same shield.             |
| 1736 to 1755. | Small Roman letters. Shape of shield changed at letter C. |
| 1756 to 1775. | Early English capitals. Shaped shield.                    |
| 1776 to 1795. | Small Roman letters. " "                                  |
| 1796 to 1815. | Roman capitals. " "                                       |
| 1816 to 1835. | Small Roman letters. " "                                  |
| 1836 to 1855. | Old English capitals. " "                                 |

It can readily be seen, therefore, that with this information, the age of a piece of silver can be established without very much doubt. There are other things to be learned and understood, of course, such as the standard marks and the differences in design of the various periods. Trends in design very often followed the fashions of the period. Thus, if you are interested, it is essential to be able to recognize the differences between Stuart, Queen Anne, Georgian and other periods. That is, if you take your collecting seriously and want to obtain one or two really good pieces.

We have several quite good silver items. One of them is a small Queen Anne coffee pot. Its shape is enchanting, with the typical plain curved belly of the period and the ebony handle. It is used on special occasions with a coffee service of yellow Worcester eggshell porcelain with each cup in a silver holder. I have been looking for some time for a cream jug and sugar basin to match, and although I have been offered many which will almost do, I have not yet succeeded in discovering the exact ones I want. Otherwise, we have the usual assortment of silver articles which may be found in most homes. My wife bought a charming oval silver photograph frame, properly marked, at a jumble sale for sixpence.

It is difficult, although not impossible, for silver articles to be forged, and this is something with which the amateur need not seriously concern himself. What is more important is that an old piece may have been "made up." In other words, a wrong base may have been added to a teapot or a candlestick which has been damaged. Such restoration does, of course,

seriously detract from an article's value as a work of art and is certainly something to be looked for. Sometimes each piece may be differently marked and this will give you the clue you want.

There is, naturally, much continental and foreign silver to be found. But as a rule this is inferior to British silver both in the quality of the precious metal and in the style of design, although there are, of course, exceptional cases.

Some articles of Sheffield plate are at the present time more valuable than certain contemporary silver. It is only within the last sixty years or so that Sheffield plate has seriously attracted the attention of the collector but, latterly, because of the scarcity of good pieces, its value has considerably increased.

Sheffield plate is not really plate at all—plate being a term which is generally meant to describe articles of precious metal, such as silver or gold. Therefore, it is really plated ware. Historically, the plating of ware is one of the oldest of arts and it was a common practice to lay on a coating of gold or silver after an article was fashioned. But the influence of the various Guilds of Goldsmiths and Silversmiths backed up by Royal Charters and Acts of Parliament was eventually strong enough to reduce this practice to an illicit art. Goods made from Sheffield plate were fashioned from the plate itself—this being the distinguishing factor between earlier plated wares, Sheffield plate and modern electro-plating.

In the first half of the eighteenth century various experiments resulted in the discovery of a method by which a copper body and a silver strip could be so united as to present a true alloy with a surface of silver. The actual process seemed to be quite simple. A thin plate of silver was placed upon a copper ingot slightly alloyed with brass. The two pieces of metal were then bound with wire and placed in a furnace until the silver was on the point of fusion. At that moment the metals were withdrawn and they were found to be joined so firmly together that they could not be separated. Also, this thick ingot of copper and silver could be rolled out to any degree of thickness while still preserving the relative proportion of silver and copper. Later developments in manufacture enabled the makers to cover the copper with silver on both sides, thus giving it the appearance of solid silver. When a cut edge showed the copper a thin wire of silver was soldered on to obscure it. Articles of Sheffield

plate were therefore made from this metal sandwich, and the finished goods were, to all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from those made of pure silver. The industry, from first to last, was in existence for about a hundred years—from 1750 to about 1850.

The earliest Sheffield plate, and that which is most eagerly sought after by collectors today, was very plain and simple in design. Moreover, as the early plate was silvered only on one side, only flat articles such as platters and snuffers were made, the underside sometimes being coated with tin. Not long after the time when Sheffield plate was becoming popular, silver design underwent a change to a more florid style and, consequently, the makers of imitation silver had to follow suit. They therefore stamped out silver dies of the more decorative and ornate portions of their articles and filled the dies with an alloy of lead and tin. This solid mass was then soldered to whatever article was being made.

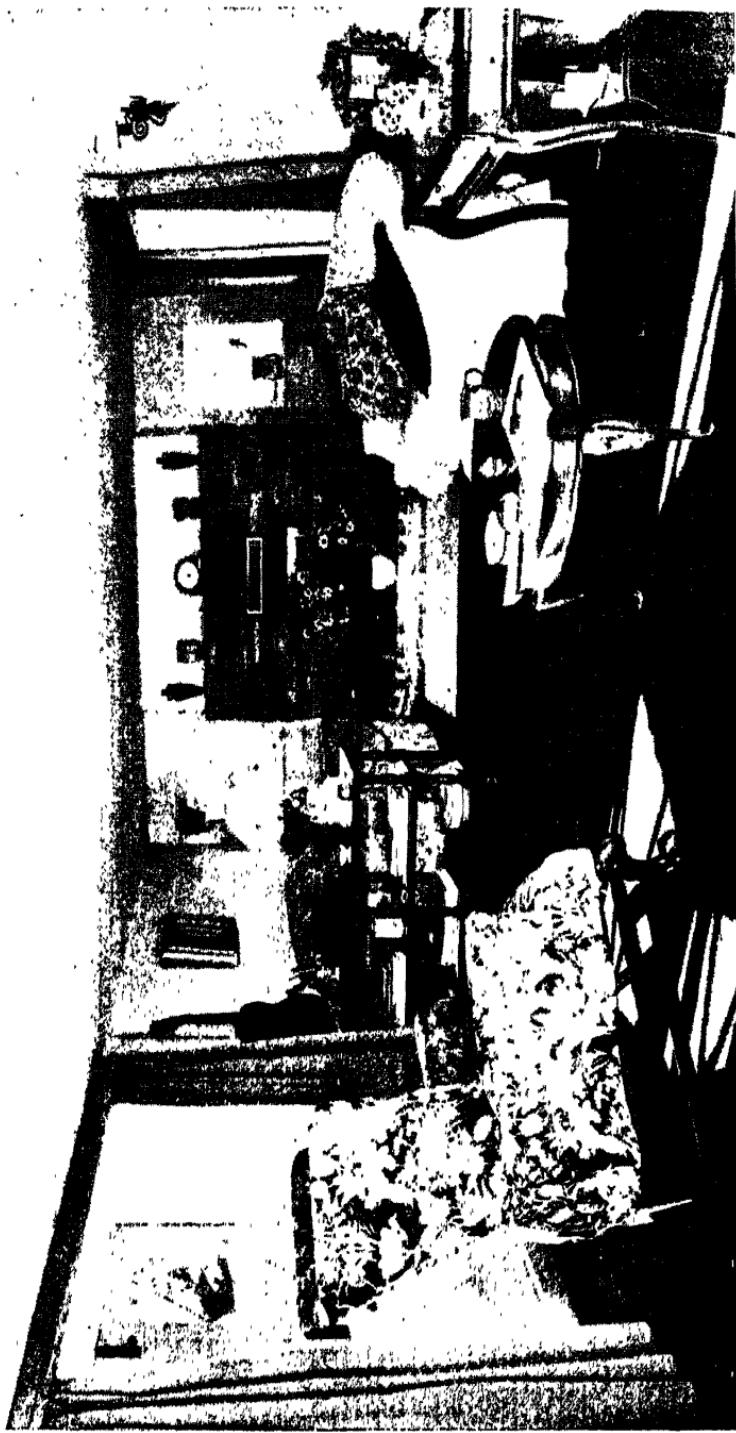
Sometime in the latter part of the nineteenth century a great deal of beautiful old Sheffield plate was melted down for the value of the silver it contained, and it was not until much later that people began to realize that if they could not afford silver articles they might just as well buy Sheffield plate, which was certainly as decorative as well as being cheaper. As this trend corresponded with a fall in the price of silver, dealers began to sell their Sheffield plate to collectors rather than send it to be melted down—and the price began to rise rapidly.

Good pieces are accordingly not easy to find today—although they can be obtained by patient and diligent searching. But they must be as near perfect as possible. I have had a dealer point out to me a large expanse of copper showing on an article of Sheffield plate as an indication that it was genuine. He was no doubt accurate in his diagnosis, but a piece so badly worn is not really worth having. It has very little value and is merely a relic of the past, mainly fashioned from copper. We have a very beautiful Sheffield plate sauceboat, of the Georgian period, and nowhere, not even at the join of the handle or where the silver wire is soldered to the edge is there a vestige of copper showing. It is, except to the expert, made of solid silver.

It is almost impossible to identify the date of a piece of Sheffield plate except by the design. The manufacturers' marks

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PLATE 3 : North end of living-room. Showing curved settee, bijouterie and decorative items



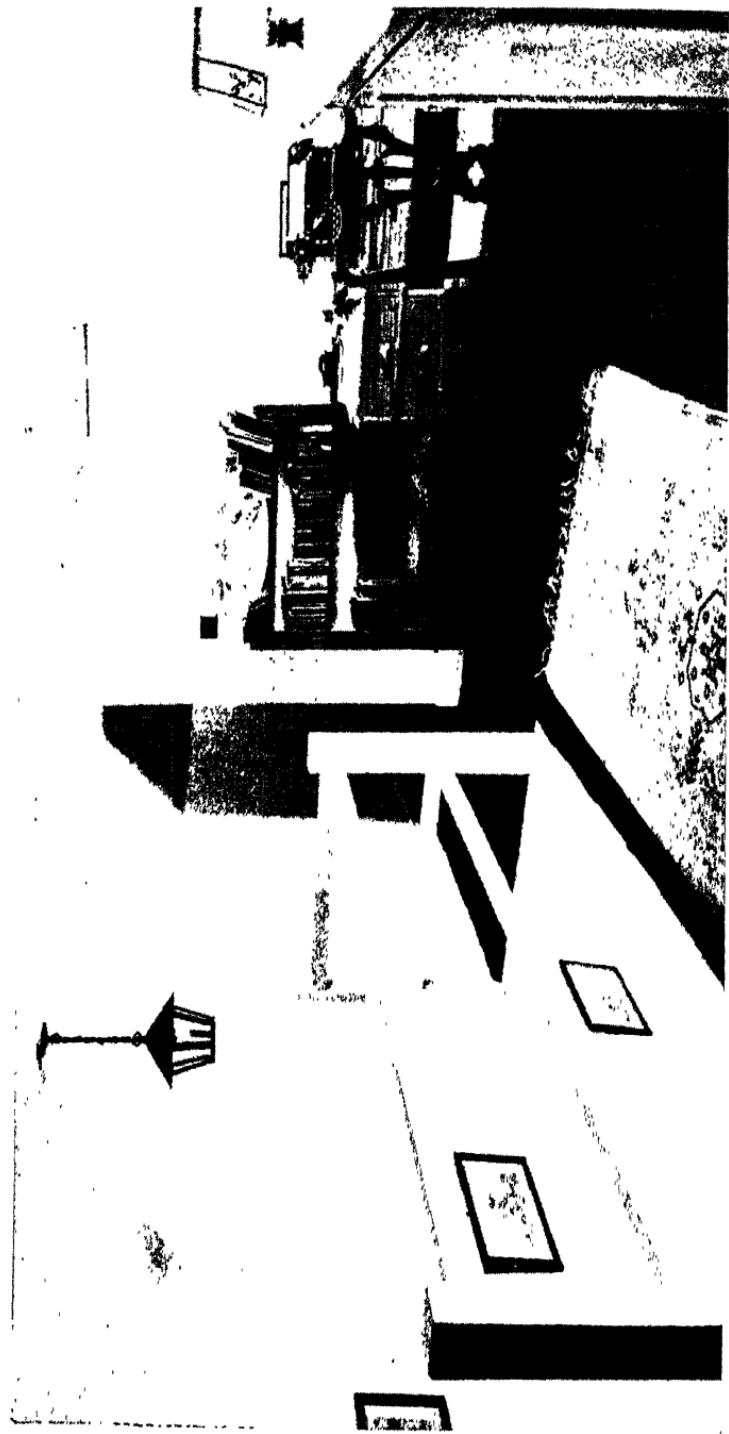
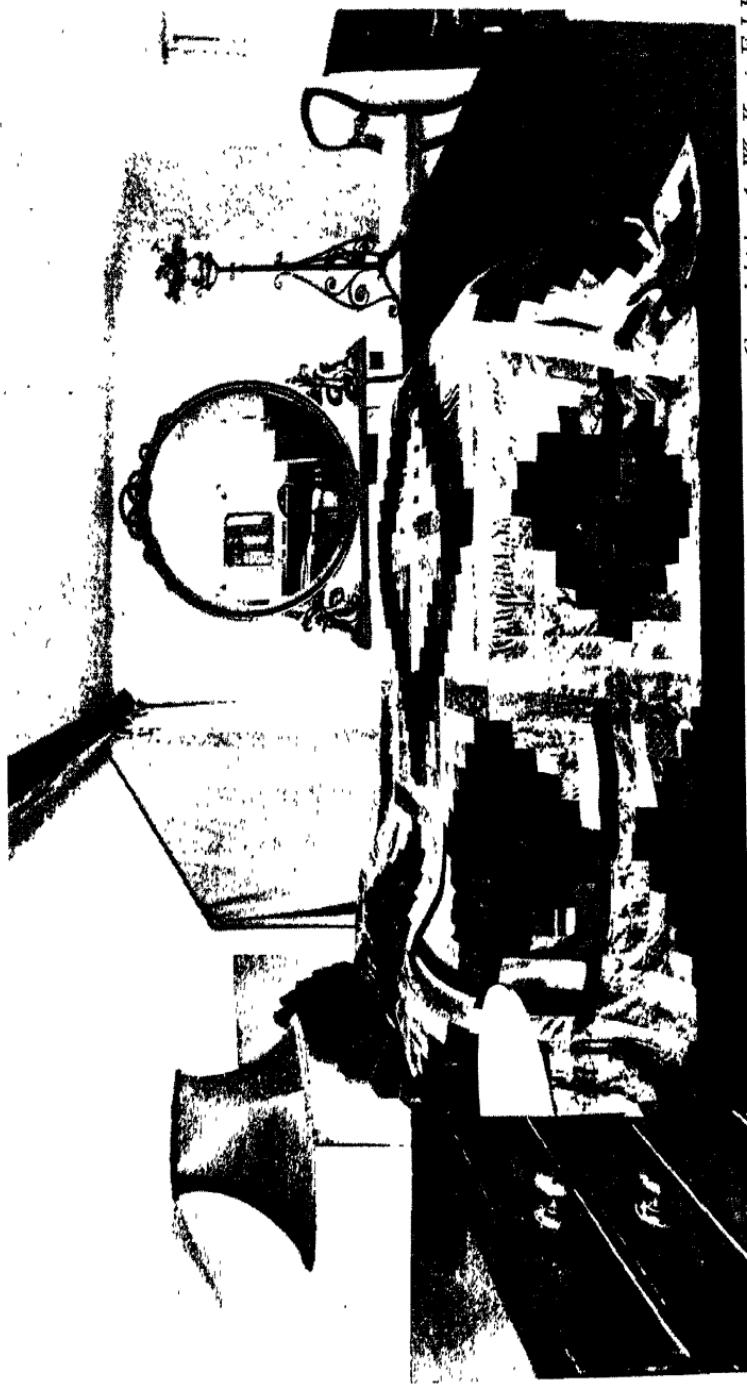


PLATE 4 : Landing used as a study. Showing Chippendale chair bought for 3s. 6d. and stripped pine desk  
*Copyright by A. W. Kerr, F.I.B.P.*

*Copyright by A. W. Kerr, F.I.B.P.*

PLATE 5 : Bedroom. Showing carved gilt mirror and American  
“log pattern” patchwork quilt





*Copyright by Walter Bird*

PLATE 6: Wilkins. Posing on staddle or rick-stone

—a bell, a portcullis, a fish and a rose are some of them—only refer to the manufactory, which may have been in business for several generations. One particular mark to look for is that of a right hand, the mark of Watson of Sheffield, who made some of the finest of the early plate. Other articles were signed with the name of the maker. In actual fact, these impressed marks only really provide evidence that the articles which carry them are of British manufacture—an important point, of course, as the market was flooded with continental copies of greatly inferior worth. Therefore, the collector should try and acquaint himself with the various styles, because this is the only sure way to estimate the date of the article he may be interested in, bearing in mind that the plainest pieces of Sheffield plate, especially those with a coating of tin on the bottom, are probably the earliest.





## CHAPTER SIX

### GLASSWARE

**M**Y wife and I were sitting comfortably by the fireside one winter's evening when we were disturbed by a sudden splintering crash at the other end of the room.

There happened to be a sou'-westerly gale blowing at the time and we thought that at least a window had blown in or cracked under the impact of a flying branch. But it was not the storm which was responsible. It was Wilkins, our cat, who had got bored and gone exploring on top of the bookshelves where stand some of our choicest items of china and glass. One of a pair of Bristol vases with hanging lustres had been knocked off and lay in ruins on the carpet.

There was no point in scolding him, for what had happened was our own fault. We had ignored the preliminary announcement of his boredom, an ear-splitting wail which is his method of telling us that he requires entertaining. He regards all shortcomings in the weather, such as high wind and rain, as our fault and a deliberate interference with his way of life. Therefore it is up to us to provide some form of compensation—such as playing games with him. His sweeping something to the ground was merely his final desperate attempt to attract our attention. Actually, we had no business to put the vase in a place where it might be subject to the whims and fancies of a temperamental cat, but we like to have our things where they can be seen and

admired, not hidden away in cabinets and showcases to be brought out only on special occasions.

My point is that glassware is probably the most expendable of one's possessions, and the prettier and more delicate one's drinking glasses the more likely they are to come to an untimely end. Many of mine, in which I took a great pride and which I was at some pains to secure, are now only a memory. But I do not regret having used them and, at least, I have the chance to replace them with something even nicer. I am consoled by the story of the Chinese Emperor whose slave broke one of a pair of precious goblets. The penalty being death for this offense, the sword of execution was handed to the Emperor himself. Whereupon, instead of slicing off the offender's head, he broke the other goblet, saying as he did so, "An object so valuable as to be worth more than a man's life should cease to exist."

The study of the art of glassmaking is highly technical and I do not believe that a knowledge of the various processes is of much help to the amateur collector. Later on, perhaps, when he has done some buying and made the same mistakes that we all do, he may be sufficiently interested to want to know more about glass manufacture. In any event, he is more concerned with the finished product. Perhaps the most important feature in the making of glassware is the fact that at a certain temperature glass is plastic and can be moulded, blown, pulled, drawn and coaxed into any shape desired. The craftsman is thus enabled to work on one of the most malleable of raw materials.

Glassmaking is one of the oldest of the fine arts, there being in existence specimens from the earliest Egyptian dynasties. Modern glassmaking really dates from the technical and artistic achievements of the Roman Empire about the first century B.C., and a visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum which houses one of the most important collections of glass in the world is most rewarding. But, as with all antiques, it is advisable to pay many visits and to concentrate only upon one thing at a time. Otherwise one is liable to become confused and to suffer from a form of artistic indigestion.

It is sad but, generally speaking, the finest specimens of the art of the glassmaker are only for those with long purses and much knowledge, who can call upon the services of eminent experts and dealers. But this is not to say that there are not still to be found many old and attractive specimens which can

be purchased cheaply and are well worth having. I was once at a country house sale when a friend of mine bought for a few shillings what appeared to be a grisly collection of modern green moulded tumblers and the usual miscellany of stopperless decanters—only useful for the kitchen. But tucked away in the bottom of the cardboard box which housed the lot was a fine old wineglass with an air-twist stem—mercifully unbroken. Only my deep respect for the law prevented me from snatching this treasure from him. Why and how it got into a box of junk will always be a mystery to me, but one does occasionally find such treasures among trash. It may have been in the back of a kitchen cupboard and was bundled into a box with other articles which happened to be on the same shelf.

I think most people who are considering acquiring a small collection of glass turn their attention towards drinking glasses. And there is, of course, endless variety to choose from. There are differently shaped glasses for almost every kind of wine, spirit and liqueur—there are brandy glasses, ale glasses, rummers, goblets—in fact, I have counted over one hundred and fifty types of English drinking glasses, almost all of them equally beautiful, and this by no means exhausts the different types. It would therefore be futile and confusing for me to attempt to give anything more than an impression of what may be looked for. By far the best thing for the amateur to do is to go out and try his luck with a few pounds to spend. That is what I have done, and my very first shot at buying old glass at a sale brought me six beautiful specimens, including a pair of Waterford goblets and an old English rummer with a square base. Included in the lot was a fine Georgian decanter with a tear blown in the stopper. And the price for the lot was twelve shillings. I am sure, therefore, that the best tests for buying old glass are visual and aural. If a glass has an attractive shape—if it has a twisted, spiral or corkscrew stem, and if it gives out a clear bell-like note when lightly struck with the fingernail—then it is a good one.

The vogue for collecting antique glass began somewhere about the middle of the nineteenth century and there was a time when it could be bought easily and cheaply—when cottages and out-of-the-way inns often housed good pieces which could be obtained for a few shillings. Perhaps it is a good thing that more

and more people are learning to appreciate the beauty of old things—particularly in an age which seems to set great store by plastic drinking vessels and other synthetic horrors, none of which is cheap to buy.

It is practically certain that the amateur will not be able to find English drinking glasses earlier than the latter half of the seventeenth century. Before that date these were mainly imported from Venice and the few examples which have survived are well known. The golden age for the manufacture of English glasses began about 1660 and lasted for some 140 years. They fall roughly into four categories, being either bell-shaped, drawn-waisted, straight-sided or cup-shaped. Many of them have spirally decorated stems, either white or colored, and some of the bowls are beautifully engraved either by a diamond point or a wheel. Some authorities say that the pontil mark—that is, the mark on the bottom where the glass has been drawn off—should be rough, but I do not think this is necessarily so because the old craftsmen were very particular about the finish of their work. My own old glasses do not show any very distinctive signs of roughness at the bottom.

The plain glasses of the time of Charles II have funnel-shaped bowls with moulded stems sometimes enclosing a tear of air which may extend into the greater part of the stem. The feet are turned underneath the stem to give additional thickness to a part of the glass which is most liable to damage.

An interesting historical fact about Jacobite drinking glasses is that they were used during the first sixty years or so of the eighteenth century by the secret Jacobite societies to drink the health of “The King over the Water.” The death of the Young Pretender in 1788 meant the end of these societies, and the legacy they left behind was these scarce and beautifully engraved glasses.

Not long ago I was lecturing to a Women's Institute. After I had given my talk I was approached by an elderly lady who asked me if I could tell her something about a piece of glass which had been in her family—she came from Scotland—as long as she could remember. After I had had a cup of tea I walked round with her to her home nearby. She showed me a most beautiful tumbler engraved with a portrait of the Young Pretender and the emblem of the Royal Crown. She was very hazy about its history; all she knew was that it had come to her

from her great-uncle's family, and she had no idea of its historical associations or its value. It was a beautiful piece of glass and ought really to have been in a museum. Nothing would induce her to part with it, but she was most grateful for the few facts I was able to give her about it. I must say that I admired her for wishing to keep such a lovely thing, especially when it was almost the only object I could see in her home which had any claim either to antiquity or artistic worth. I told her that I hoped she would have many years to enjoy its possession and that when she died it ought to be bequeathed to the Edinburgh Museum.

There are many other glass items which may be collected apart from drinking glasses—in fact, one might almost say too many. Old Venetian glass is most attractive as a form of decoration, the candlesticks and mirrors being particularly enchanting. We have an exquisite green Venetian glass candlestick in the form of a dragon which I have mentioned in my opening chapter. In spite of its fragility and its age it is not even chipped. One may spend a lifetime collecting only looking-glasses and hand mirrors of which there are many to choose from, ranging from the early mirrors with Vauxhall plate to the ornate examples of the Meissen factory with their arrays of cupids and roses. It is amusing to look in your house and see exactly how many mirrors you have and what they are. My own inventory includes a fine Regency gilt mirror in carved wood, a Sheraton dressing-table mirror, an Empire mirror in a gold frame hanging over a dressing-table, a French hand mirror which has a miniature of Marie Antoinette painted on ivory on the back, a small wrought-iron mirror on a single leg, and a hideous modern thing in the bathroom which is the only possible glass at which I have ever been able to shave. And I have not collected mirrors—they have simply been acquired in the ordinary course of furnishing at sales.

I still recall with bitterness, however, the day when my wife and I went to a cottage sale. There were, among the usual articles of useful household furnishings, just three beautiful things, a Meissen mirror and a pair of fine Bohemian glass goblets. They were on the point of being knocked down to us when in walked a well-known London dealer. By some evil chance he was holidaying in the vicinity and, as it was a wet day, he was taking a busman's holiday and attending a sale. He

came in at just the wrong moment for us. His eyes lit up and he leaped into the fray with an over-bid of five pounds. In desperation my wife bid up to nearly twenty, much more than we could afford for articles we did not really want and we had to let them go. The dealer bore off his prizes with four eyes glaring balefully at him and seemed mightily pleased with himself, as well he might be, as the mirror itself was very old and was probably worth thirty or forty pounds.

This incident does emphasize the point that in spite of the ravages of the dealer and collector over the past 150 years there are still treasures to be found. And it is not always the country mansion or manor which houses them. In my own village I have seen beautiful old things carefully preserved in humble homes. The owners do not always know what they are, but they belonged to the family, either a great-grandmother or some other remote ancestor and consequently they must be cherished. And quite rightly too. If every home in the country possessed only one lovely old thing it would compensate for much of the tawdriness of modern life.

The Bristol and Nailsea glassworks made a great variety of ware in colors ranging from opaque white to green, blue, red, pink, brown and yellow, and among the articles produced, in addition to table glass, were witch-balls, rolling pins, pipes and walking-sticks. A friend of mine had a fine collection of Bristol glass pipes in all sizes from very small to very large. He bought them all after the last war at prices ranging from a few shillings to several pounds, and nearly always when he went to a strange town he returned with another pipe. They were arranged around his fireplace in his house at Hampstead and they made a charming and unusual decoration. When he went to live in South Africa a year or two back he sold his collection at quite a handsome profit.

Also worth collecting, but more perhaps for one's own personal enjoyment, are the glass lustres which were once used to make ornate glass chandeliers. It is not likely that you will find a whole chandelier which can be bought cheaply but odd lustres can be put to many uses. We have made an unusual pair of bedroom bracket lights by taking the candlesticks, or candle holders, from an old piano, wiring them for electricity and decorating them with Waterford drops. We have also made

a Thing (I don't know what to call it) which hangs in one window of the living-room. It consists of part of an apothecary's scales to which have been fixed half a dozen lustres. The window faces east, and the rising sun, shining through the lustres, throws a beautiful rainbow pattern on to the carpet, or dances about the room when the Thing is shaken.

Witch-balls, by the way, were made to hang in the doorway to keep away evil spirits. They were generally made by the apprentice glassblowers when they were trying their hand at blowing. We in these parts have a number of green and white glass balls which we call witch-balls, but these are really fishermen's floats which we find on the rocky coast after a sou'-westerly gale has blown them ashore.

I really should not spend much time writing about antique glass paperweights. Their popularity during the past fifty years or so has taken them far beyond the reach of the ordinary person, and the possessor of any of these beautiful things is to be envied. The best specimens now fetch some hundreds of pounds, which I think is another instance of the cupidity of the rich collector placing an artificial value upon articles which were originally made for no other purpose than to give pleasure to the wives and sweethearts of the craftsmen who made them. Some of them, which are masterpieces of sheer skill, were tossed off in their spare time by the master craftsmen as a demonstration of their powers.

It is therefore stupid for me even to suggest that the amateur collector with a few pounds to spend can go out and find good specimens cheaply. Nearly every person who owns one is well aware of its value. At any rate it has never been my good fortune to find an antique glass paperweight which was cheap. I have seen many offered for sale in antique shops but these were either badly scratched and worn and in consequence had lost much of their value, or else they were highly priced fakes. Generally speaking, if you are offered one for a few pounds it cannot be much good. No dealer is going to sell an article cheaply for which he is assured a large price at a public sale.

The snags for the beginner are that there are now many modern reproductions coming from abroad which are sold as antiques and, unless he has the requisite knowledge, he is at the mercy of the dealers. It is not uncommon for the bottoms of

these weights to be scratched to give an appearance of age—this is an entirely false conception, because the bottoms of good antique specimens should be comparatively unworn. One can be in no doubt, when one has closely examined old paperweights, as to the genuineness of the real article. I had the good fortune some years ago to handle a number of fine weights belonging to the Bristol Arts Club and they were as different from modern fakes as chalk is from cheese.

My constant regret is that in the days before the war when I might have acquired a few old paperweights I was more interested in girls and fast cars and night clubs, and all the obvious ways of wasting money which appeal to the young and foolish. I sigh for lost opportunities, particularly for those days when I travelled at my firm's expense all over England, Scotland and Wales. What finds I might have had in the junk shops of the sleepy towns of those days! However, I try to console myself with the thought that a bomb might have destroyed everything I owned and I might now be suffering even greater agonies of bereavement.

Anyway, a few facts about antique glass paperweights may not come amiss, purely as a point of interest. The finest examples are generally regarded as having been made in France at three main factories: at St. Louis, at Baccarat in the Vosges Mountains and at Clichy. These factories produced designs such as *millefiori* (thousand flowers), the snake and the butterfly, and portraits and other designs under the glass, all of which were extensively copied. The principal British factories were those at Bristol, Nailsea and Stourbridge. The great attraction of these old paperweights is in the study of all the various designs under the glass which magnifies them and brings out the details clearly. This being said, I am still quite unable to understand why it is that they are now so extremely valuable.

Because I will have some paperweights around the house and as they must also be antique, I have had to compromise. Even the best of them were of the nineteenth century and mine are nineteenth-century also. Whenever I can find them I buy plain Victorian paperweights which have a view or picture either painted or stuck on the bottom. To the connoisseur it is perhaps a poor compromise, but these little objects have a great deal of charm of their own. They are certainly part of an epoch which has gone by and there is something rather fascinating in

a collection of them. Moreover, some of the glass is quite as good as that from which the *millefiori* weights were made. It is true that most of them are essentially Victorian but one day they may have much more value than they have at the moment. I have bought most of mine for a few shillings each and the average price today is from five to ten shillings for a good specimen. Quite recently I sent one to a friend in America and although it was a gift which had cost very little money, she was most appreciative. So they are not to be despised. They are often to be found hidden away in junk shops, somewhat forlorn and despised. But one day there may be a vogue for them, as there was in the early part of this century for those which are now so eagerly sought after and which change hands at such high prices.

Very often one can create one's own fashions in antiques and as an instance of this, while we are talking about glass, I will cite the case of the person who first thought of decorating a shelf with old wine and spirit bottles. This idea caught on so quickly that soon everyone was scratching about in dark cellars looking for old flagons and demi-johns—regrettably empty, alas—in the thick, glowing green and deep amber glass which makes them so ornamental.

My wife picked up for five shillings in a local auction room three old French bottles, tall and slender and with twin handles, in color very like the Bristol green. One was slightly larger than the other two which were a pair. She gave the odd one away and not long afterwards was mortified to see one exactly like it in a London antique shop priced two guineas! The pair we kept can be seen on the stone mantelshelf in our living-room. (Plate 3.)

Pharmacy jars, which used to be displayed in every chemist's shop filled with brightly colored fluids, are popular also, and would make an attractive collection if you can find any.

Certain glassware items, such as the Victorian vases with pendant lustres, are not suitable for collecting. They come in pairs and a pair of them is as many as you would want to own. You can see ours beside the wine bottles in the picture—which was taken before the accident, when we still had the pair. Now that we have only one we seem to esteem it more. It is classically simple in shape—some of them were hideously ornate—and is

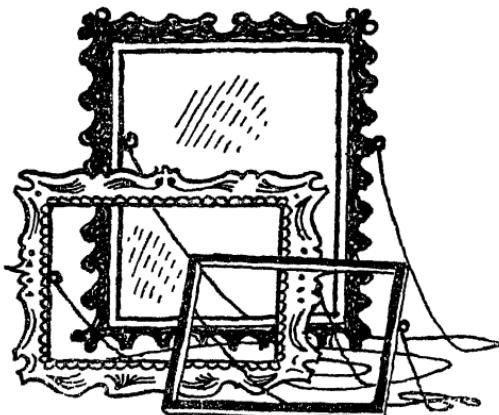
made of the milky white Bristol glass which looks more like alabaster. It has charming touches of gilt decoration here and there. We keep it now where it is more likely to be safe, and where in summer it gets the draught from an open window which makes the lustres swing and tinkle as they were meant to do.

Wilkins, our cat, is now of soberer age and less liable to go mountaineering on shelves and mantelpieces. This is just as well, for with middle age he has reached majestic proportions and weighs rather a lot. This means that he takes up a lot of room, and it happened that the Rhodian vase (mentioned in Chapter One) got in his way when he wanted to snooze on the window-sill in the hall not long ago. So he pushed it off. It made a resounding crash on the flagstones. I don't repine because I never grew really fond of it. It was a lumpy-looking thing with little but its age to recommend it.

Adding the Rhodian to the Bristol vase, plus some Staffordshire saucers, makes quite a tally. But we consider that Wilkins gives us as much pleasure as any, or all, of the items he has cost us. And I have to bear in mind that I broke *his* milk bowl, an earthenware porringer to which he was greatly attached.

If anyone thinks cat worship is carried to extremes in this household I would like to refer them to the following fact. Among the treasures of the Manchu emperors, when what was left of the imperial collection came to light after the fall of the dynasty, was a bowl of priceless porcelain inscribed "Cat food dish."





## CHAPTER SEVEN

### PICTURES

**M**Y qualifications for talking about art—that is, about paintings, prints, mezzotints, aquatints, sculpture and so on—exist largely in my own imagination. This is not a bad thing in its way, because my mind is therefore free and receptive. It is not cluttered up with current jargon about forms and styles of painting, and I am able to accept the pictures I like and reject those I don't without obligation to anything except my own taste. If I can see in my own mind what an artist is attempting to do I am satisfied, providing he has the technical skill and the creative impulse necessary to interpret his ideas and is not a mere splasher of paint on canvas.

I once deeply offended an artist friend because I told him that his surrealistic paintings were incomprehensible to me. They were also very badly executed. I was, in consequence, forced to listen to a long lecture on existentialism in relation to painting and why it was necessary for him to flout all the conventional technique in order to achieve the effects aimed at. To my way of thinking the portrait of a woman with a tree growing out of her stomach is bad art, whether or not it represents a deep psychological interpretation of the life cycle seen through the eyes of a modern visionary. Artists of this school are as adept as politicians in seeing only their own point of view which they endeavor to cram down everybody's throat; but

if they cannot explain their viewpoint to me, the common man, their arguments are as unconvincing as their paintings are unpleasing.

The work of Blake, Hogarth, Doré and other imaginative artists not only contained superb craftsmanship but a force and even savagery which was readily understandable. I might not like their work or even want to own it, but I can understand and appreciate the creative force which drove them. More than anything else these men and their kind were artists, not half-baked disciples of an esoteric cult.

In my early days I was friendly with an artist who painted nudes. They were very bad nudes, but he could be found most days in his Kilburn studio bogged down with another one. The finished works were hung round his studio and the general impression was that of a butcher's shop in the days when carcasses used to hang out on hooks. They confirmed my impression that women are generally more attractive when clothed, as most famous courtesans fully realized. One has only to look at the magnificent portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour by Boucher, in the Wallace Collection, to know this. Her exquisite gown discloses just enough of her figure to intrigue and not enough to offend, and her enigmatic expression holds promise of delightful things to come.

I am sure that my friend's painting fulfilled him emotionally, but I never saw any signs of financial reward for his labors and he had to abandon his painting and take a job. This was a pity because it is saddening to see a creative artist frustrated and disappointed. But it was a clear case of a person with no talent whatever pursuing an ideal he could never attain because the divine spark was missing. I am certain that in later years I recognized some of his clammy-looking pictures in the junk shops of Kilburn and St. John's Wood.

My reactions are probably conventional in the sense that my artistic education stops dead at the beginning of the present century and I find more pleasure in the remembrance of things past than in those of the present epoch. This is either a sign of advancing age or retarded mentality. Most modern young men would tell me that there is nothing to compare with the beauty of a supersonic aircraft in flight. My retort is that, although I have flown in them, I do not trust aircraft. I don't think they have got these heavier-than-air machines right yet and if I had

my way I should much prefer to live in the eighteenth century rather than the present.

These thoughts are mere idle digressions, leading me away from my purpose of talking about pictures. The discerning person will realize that I am in a quandary. How is it possible to advise the beginner, who has no knowledge of art and very little money, what to look for, when it would seem that even the most modest work by a known artist will fetch its price? To select good work by an unknown artist is a difficult task, even for an expert. I could write chapter after chapter of artistic jargon filched from text-books and standard works and nobody would be any the wiser. The only advice I can offer is to repeat the adage that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and that the pictures you like and which please you æsthetically are the ones you should have. Art is not functional in the accepted sense. Its purpose is to enhance our appreciation of beauty and to provide a record of some figure or scene which attracts us. A reproduction of a work of one of the French modern painters such as Gauguin, van Gogh, Renoir or Matisse, may give you infinitely more pleasure than the ownership of, say, Rembrandt's "The Anatomy Lesson," which, although a priceless work, gave me the horrors when I saw it in the Hague Museum. Art is essentially personal and all one can do is to point out some of the ways in which one can enjoy looking for pictures. If in the process one buys something for a few shillings which is worth a few pounds, then so much the better.

To begin with, it is the ambition, I suppose, of amateur art collectors to buy in a salesroom or junk shop some blackened oil painting which turns out to be a lost Titian or Correggio for which the art world has been searching for years. We ourselves have not been immune from this fanciful wishful thinking. In fact the virus infected us at an early date, when we bought for a few pence a crude painting of what appeared to be a heraldic animal in a pastoral setting. It was difficult in the dim light of the junk shop to discover what it actually was, as it was filthy and discolored as well as being tucked away under a mountainous and insecure heap of washstands and dubious bedding. We were sure we had a find. Nobody could possibly have painted such a daub unless it was to disguise something else, which was probably a stolen art treasure. As I had at that time been reading a book

on art forgeries with particular references to how these were sometimes detected by X-rays, and how if there was over-painting it was possible either to clean or strip off the top layers of paint, we were convinced that a little effort would show a rich reward.

We labored with paint stripper, being meticulously careful to do only a small portion at a time in order not to destroy or damage the masterpiece which had been concealed. All we succeeded in doing was to expose the wood upon which the daub had been painted. There was nothing underneath it at all, except a piece of worm-eaten pine, and we reluctantly came to the conclusion that the painting was probably a crude old inn sign which had been executed in return for a quart of ale and a helping of boiled beef and pease pudding. We gave the thing to a local jumble sale, but no one bought it, not even for fire-wood, and the last we saw of it was the reproachful face of the animal staring at us from a corner of the hall.

Our next excursion into the world of art was infinitely more rewarding. We found, or rather my wife did, in a dirty junk shop in Hampstead, a small oil painting on wood which, even to our untutored eyes, stood out like a jewel in a trash box. There was no mistaking that this was the work of a great artist, dirty and dusty though the painting was in its grimy and cobwebby frame. We paid the price asked and bore off our capture. Hours of careful cleaning and refurbishing brought a rich reward. Out of the dirt and dust emerged a picture which is truly beautiful. It depicts the head of a Roman shepherd boy posed against a sky of Mediterranean blue, looking exactly as if he had just looked in through a window to wish somebody a shy good morning. The artist has caught the innocent face of childhood to perfection and the beautiful Italian eyes and the delicate flush on the olive cheeks are lifelike. To us it is every bit as enchanting as Gainsborough's "Blue Boy," and we think it a masterpiece. It was painted by a Roman artist in the mid-nineteenth century and I will hazard a guess that one day the work of this man will be discovered and appraised at its true value.

The picture seems to have brought us good luck, if a possession can ever be said to do so, almost as though it was glad to be rescued from the dingy hole in which we found it and given a loving home. I dislike investing inanimate objects with a personality, but in this instance I believe that what one is seeing

is the personality of the artist, or rather a particular mood of happiness and confidence in the essential goodness of mankind. I never look at the picture without feeling better for having done so. It hangs in its gold frame on the white wall of our living-room in such a position as to catch the morning sunlight and the glow from the fire on winter evenings.

My point here is that although one may study all the books which have been written about artists and their work, from the medieval painters of religious subjects, through the Renaissance, the pre-Raphaelites, the post-Raphaelites, the Impressionists and the Surrealists, ultimately it is one's own eye and one's feeling for mood and form and color which is the truest guide. Therefore, if one has any appreciation of art at all, one's chances of finding a picture worth a place of honor in one's home and which may at the same time have intrinsic as well as artistic value are not to be underrated.

The history of visual art is one of disappointment and frustration for its creators, many of whom lived in poverty and worked under extreme difficulties. One should perhaps exclude the portrait painter as he usually worked on definite commissions and, according to the quality of his work and the patronage he received, often became rich and famous in his own time. The great English portrait painters, such as Romney, Sir Peter Lely, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough, were honored and rewarded during their lifetimes. Lely became so rich that he was able to purchase a collection of old masters which belonged to Charles I. On his death Lely's collection of pictures was sold for £26,000, no mean sum in those days.

The beginner with a little money to spend cannot expect to buy old masters and, in any event, he is not likely at first to be able to discriminate between an original and a good copy. Also, most modern homes are not suited to the display of huge oil paintings which need a good deal of attention and must be kept in the right temperature. One can always see the great works of art in the national museums and galleries, the contents of which belong to all of us, and in the English homes which are now so freely opened to the public. It is much better to see great pictures in their proper surroundings. I find nothing more depressing than a collection of gloomy old oil paintings which have not been properly cared for, and there are few things

more disconcerting than to turn the corner of a landing in a strange house on a dark evening and come face to face with a portrait of a savage-looking hound frowning into the distance.

The junk shops and salesrooms are full of badly painted oils which have lost all their color and freshness and from whose frames the gold leaf is peeling in strips. It is sometimes impossible to give these relics away, much less sell them, and I do counsel you not to be led away by sale fever and buy any of these horrors. It is far better to buy an attractive water-color or a good print.

You may also have something, either in your possession or that of your family, which may be worth money. As an instance of how fortune may be hidden away in the attic, I was told a story by a member of a famous firm of auctioneers which amply illustrates this point. This firm had received instructions to call at a country house. Its owner had recently died and the house and contents were to be put up for sale. The contents had already been valued by a local firm but, as an afterthought, one of the relatives had called in an expert valuer to check if anything of importance had been missed. The valuer went through the house but could find nothing which should be withdrawn from the local sale and sent to London. The furnishings were good useful articles which his firm did not handle. As he was leaving, and purely out of kindness because he could feel the disappointment of the family, he asked if there was anything, anywhere, he had not seen. One member of the family recollects that there was a portfolio of drawings in the attic which had been brought home many years ago from abroad. Nobody had thought very much of them and they had remained in their original wrapping for many years, finally being relegated to the attic. The drawings were brought down and examined. The valuer said that he thought they were interesting but he was not an art expert, and with the family's permission he would take them back to London for proper appraisal. The outcome was that the drawings were found to be "old master" drawings by one of the great artists and they were put up for sale publicly. They fetched a sum approaching twenty thousand pounds. Had they been left in the local sale they might have fetched only a few shillings as junk and been lost for ever.

There are, of course, countless stories of this kind—some true, some mere figments of the imagination—because we all

like to gild the lily when we can, especially in connection with some artistic treasure we have discovered. But undoubtedly there have been many such finds in the world of art. Most artists were prolific workers, with a large output, much of which they did not think highly of themselves and which they either gave away or sold for small sums. Some of it was unsigned and has to be identified by experts who have studied the work of a particular artist closely. Many paintings came to light only after the death of the artist. It is commonplace to say that artists are only honored after they are dead and gone. Manet, a great admirer of Goya, and an originator of the French Impressionists, was reviled for the greater part of his life for his famous work "The Bath," which hangs in the Louvre. Indeed, it was not until nearly the end of his life that he received recognition in his own country. Paintings which he originally sold for a song have changed hands over and over again for fabulous sums of money—yet he was grudgingly given the Legion of Honor when he was almost on his deathbed. It is to Manet that the world owes the work of Renoir, Monet, Pissarro, Cézanne, Degas and other great artists who followed his style of painting.

The beginner may ask what this has to do with him. What chance has he of finding something good and how will he know what to look for when the galleries and shops are filled with the work of hundreds of artists covering every style and period of art, good, bad and indifferent?

The question is almost impossible to answer, but not quite. Good draughtsmanship and grouping, effective colouring and what one can only call (for want of a better term) visual impact, are all pointers in the right direction, whether your unformed taste inclines more to the modernistic or naturalistic school. If naturalism attracts you you cannot do better than study the best—I mean the acknowledged best, the greatest picture ever painted by an Englishman—Constable's "The Hay Wain," at the National Gallery in London. Constable was the great genius of the naturalistic or representational school, who took such pains to achieve verisimilitude that he would bring home leaves, lichen and moss in his pocket in order to study their textures and coloring. It is a sad reflection on the taste of his contemporaries that this wonderful picture was sold in 1824 to a French dealer for £70, and that recognition of the artist in his

own country was extremely tardy. In France it was much quicker.

Personally I am not of the opinion that one should stand in front of a picture for hours trying to absorb its "message" before one makes up one's mind about it. I believe that a true work of art should make an instantaneous impression on the eyes, and thence strike deep through the senses into the heart.

Since I hate being told by other people what I ought to like I have gone to some trouble to find out for myself. Often at local shows and sometimes in London galleries I am to be seen trudging earnestly round hoping to consolidate the opinions I hold. I find that those pictures which I can remember afterwards, those which *have* reached my senses through my eyes, are usually the ones esteemed by others and which find buyers.

Though I can admire many of the moderns I think that my own taste is for naturalism. If this were not so I would be less strongly attached to the one oil painting I possess—my shepherd boy. It satisfies me utterly and I want no other.

Only one other picture I have ever seen has made an equally strong appeal to me. This is a water-color. It is a Roman classical interior by Fortunino Matania and it hangs in his studio in Hampstead. Unlike the shepherd boy this is never likely to belong to me, for Matania regards it as his masterpiece and has always steadfastly refused to sell it, even to the late Queen Mary. When he dies he will probably bequeath it to a museum. It is a scene of Roman girls bathing in a marble pool; but to state the subject in this bald way is to give no intimation of the beauty of it—the transparency of the draperies, the effect of reflected sunlight on rose-colored marble and alabaster and on the lovely bodies of the girls is, to me, breathtaking. When I lived in London I would frequently walk the mile or so to Matania's studio as much to gaze at this picture as to renew acquaintance with my old friend.

The last time I saw it was very nearly the last time mortal eyes beheld it at all. It was during the worst days of the bombing of London. Matania's studio has an enormous north light. In fact the whole of the north wall is virtually of glass. Regardless of this he spent his days quietly painting, either to please himself or to fulfil his numerous commissions, and neither Hitler nor anything else was allowed to interrupt his routine.

Visitors to the studio were expected to conform in this respect and it was an unwritten law that no one should show signs of alarm or despondency even when the heavens rained bombs. A whole stick of them landed very close that day, but by some miracle the studio remained undamaged, the glass wall stayed intact and Matania's visitors went on drinking tea and making pleasant conversation.

The would-be collector has another field for exploration among the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century prints. Mezzotints, aquatints, lithographs, color prints, etchings and all examples of the engraver's art have been popular since about the middle of the last century. Engravings after such painters as Hoppner, Romney, Reynolds, Gainsborough, Hogarth and Wheatley fetch high prices for the early plates—that is, the first printings. Later copies, taken when the copper or steel plates have become worn, may not be so desirable to the connoisseur but they are certainly worth having to the novice. As prints they are representative of their period and most of them show much of the color, even if this does not in all cases quite measure up to their original beauty.

A report of a sale of prints at Christie's in February, 1902, says that a collection of prints divided into 865 lots fetched £4728, 8s., the total number offered running into several thousands. The report adds that a few fetched prices around the 100 guineas mark, such as "Miss Cumberland," after Romney, engraved by J. R. Smith, while the rest may be commercially designated as "rubbish," and dismissed as such. Perhaps during the ensuing fifty odd years some of the "rubbish" may have found its way back into circulation and can be found if one looks hard enough. It is certain that the names of Smith, W. Ward and Schiavonetti, all first-class engravers, will be on some of these prints and even if they are late impressions they are worth having. In the same year a set of thirteen "Cries of London," after F. Wheatley, by Schiavonetti, Vendramini, Cardon and Gaugain were sold for 430 guineas. Nowadays, a complete set of these prints must be very hard to come by, but even one or two, which may not have a great deal of intrinsic value, would be worth having. An old dealer in Swanage, now retired, owned a number of Bartolozzi color prints. I was not sufficient of an authority to know if they were good or

not—for all I know they may have been reproductions of original prints—but they were certainly very beautiful.

I am of the opinion that it is not quite so difficult to recognize a good print as some of the experts would have us believe. There is usually something which makes it distinctive. At one sale, through being too slow off the mark, I missed a set of about thirty Regency boxing prints, all of famous exponents of "the fancy." The auctioneer opened with a bid of ten pounds which had been left by a dealer. There was no other bid and my heart failed me at the critical moment. I said nothing. But I am sure that they were worth far more than ten pounds and I have bitterly regretted my lack of courage. Anything which is worth ten pounds to a dealer must have a value considerably above that figure. It was my own fault, of course, for not examining the goods properly. Bundles of pictures should always be untied and scrutinized, especially at small cottage and country house sales. You never know what you may find. A print or a picture may have been taken out of its frame at some time and put away and forgotten—only to see the light of day when the contents of the house come up for sale at the owner's death.

Another type of work which has always made an appeal to British people is miniature painting. There were many great miniature painters from Hans Holbein the younger, and Nicholas Hilliard, to Cooper, Romney and Angelica Kauffman. The miniature was originally intended to be worn on the person as a jewel and the rich and decorative attire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made an ideal setting for these lovely small portraits. They were usually painted on ivory and may occasionally be found in the most unlikely places, such as locked bureau drawers and old jewel cases.

If you are collecting for profit the rule is always to buy originals, if you can find them. Whoever first thought of acquiring original Toulouse-Lautrec poster drawings was laying up treasure for himself. If you are buying for your pleasure then you may well be content with something less ambitious. The seaside landlady no doubt gets as much pleasure from a colored reproduction of "The Stag at Bay," or "The Monarch of the Glen," as does the owner of an original Beardsley or Whistler. It is all in the point of view. No one should say

categorically what another ought to like in the way of art. And in any case the fashions of one generation may be anathema to another. The huge paintings of Leighton and Millais and other Victorian artists, once so highly thought of, are now almost unknown outside the special galleries. And the names of Alma Tadema and McWhirter now call up very little except a dusty echo from huge studios in St. John's Wood—now given over to less artistic pursuits such as the serving of solid meals to people in the neighborhood. But all these artists were representative of their period—they painted what public taste demanded and one day, perhaps, their work may be viewed more kindly.

The embryo art collector therefore has the world at his feet. He may browse to his heart's content among the world's great masterpieces. He is free to make his own choice as to what he will collect, be it classical nudes or comic caricatures by Cruikshank or Rowlandson. He may even start a vogue for a forgotten or a new artist, though not many of us are in a position to act as art patrons these days. The debt owed by the French Impressionists to the late Gertrude Stein is immeasurable. Miss Stein's contribution to literature is questionable, but her taste in art was flawless. It enabled her to buy during the early years of the century large numbers of paintings by unknown artists who have since become recognized masters. Through her patronage they were helped to continue their work when they might otherwise have starved in their traditional garrets.

In the photo of our entrance hall you can see three of a rare set of Alken sporting prints which were among the first things we acquired for our Dorset home. It was my wife who bought them, and the incident goes to prove that a little native common sense is worth as much to the beginner as a manual of information. It happened in this way. At the view of a sale in Poole she met a woman she had last seen many years before. Renewing their acquaintance they rummaged among the dusty goods together and came upon a lot comprising two sets of Alken prints, six in each, in the proper frames and in good condition. The other lady wanted some prints to complete the furnishing of her husband's study, but the study being a small one she only wanted one set and asked my wife if she would care to split the lot with her. My wife agreed. It was knocked down to them at

six guineas ; and then arose the question of dividing the spoils. The lady admitted that she knew little about prints of any kind and said that if my wife had a preference she was welcome to take first choice. My wife had only made a cursory inspection in a rather bad light and as yet knew little more than that one set was of coaching and the other of hunting scenes. Examining them now more closely she saw that whereas the coaching ones were color prints of a fairly common kind, the hunting set was clearly tinted in water-color *by hand*, each being dated 1818. She therefore, without hesitation, chose the latter. Having done so her conscience pricked her and she explained that the set she had chosen was probably far more valuable, and offered to surrender it. She reaped the reward of virtue.

“ Fair’s fair,” the lady said. “ We agreed that you should have first pick. And in any case I prefer the coaching ones as I think they are prettier.” Another case in point, you see, of a buyer who refused to be guided by anything but her own individual taste. I will repeat, for I cannot do so too often, that there is no other criterion or guide for the small man—by which I mean the small collector with limited means and limited knowledge.

I have a friend who owns some very good antique furniture, his drawing-room contains only authentic pieces—and yet on the wall in the place of honor hangs a large picture which is a print and not an original. But what a print ! It is of a famous Vermeer, one of those glowing Dutch interiors with a great shaft of sunlight pouring on to the serene housewife preparing the family dinner. Its peaceful beauty soothes the heart in the same way as our Roman shepherd boy. My friend does not care a jot that the picture is only a reproduction. He would have to sell his house and everything else he owns, he says, to buy the original, and he is content to have even a copy of anything so beautiful. In this context, I know of one man who actually did sell his house in order to buy a picture he coveted. It was a Renoir. And now he lives in two rooms in one of the shabbier parts of London, and his Renoir watches over him like a guardian fetish. You may feel that this is carrying a love of art to absurd extremes. But such fanaticism is by no means uncommon. Even in my own small circle I can cite cases where people have made considerable sacrifices to realize an ideal.

But I have only contempt for the people who seem to me

at the other end of the scale, namely those who cling to so-called works of art, usually ancestral portraits, they have inherited, irrespective of their merit and simply because they are family possessions. Just because a painting is old does not mean that it is good. There were as many bad portrait painters in bygone times as there are now, and some of them were much in demand and covered miles of canvas perpetuating the features of nonentities besides those which have some claim to fame. And excessively repellent some of them were, too. I have sat at tables in the dining-rooms of my wealthier acquaintances surrounded by a positive rogues' gallery of ugly, fleshy, simpering or scowling visages peering from blackened canvas round the walls and spoiling my appetite every time I raised my eyes. I have no sympathy and no respect for people who hang on to such beastly rubbish for sentiment's sake. One of my secret longings is to be let loose with an axe in one of those dining-rooms and allowed to do my worst.

It was a family portrait of this kind that Tanner bought on one occasion when we were at an auction sale together. I dare say it had come on to the market by order of the executors of an estate. It was very large, about four feet by three, and in an immensely heavy, ornate and costly frame. Evidently somebody had once thought highly of it. To start with, I must confess that Tanner and I did, too. We thought we had quite a find. We had a lot of trouble getting it into Tanner's small van—he was staying with me at the time—and after we had got it home we set it up in the hall and contemplated it in triumph.

It was then that reaction set in. The subject of the painting was a woman in indeterminate clothing, vaguely of the Regency period, seated—or rather leaning in a negligent attitude over a table. Her hands, crossed at the wrist, hung over the table's edge in the mid-foreground of the picture. They were long and pale and evidently a source of pride to the sitter. The picture was not badly painted but it was unsigned. On the back was a yellowing label with "Mrs. Ward" written on it in faded ink. This was evidently the identity of the sitter. The only other clue, if clue it could be called, was the name of the frame-maker, an Indian in Madras.

Now the main thing about owning a large picture of any kind is that you have to live with it. It's not something you

can poke away in the boot cupboard. And we found we couldn't live with this one for more than twenty-four hours. After that, every time we looked at it we hated it more. There was something about that limp, mournful-looking female that depressed us unutterably. And those hands dangling in the foreground, though they had been painted with much care and considerable skill, looked bigger and bonier every minute. We covered the picture with a rug until Tanner's visit came to an end and he drove back to town, taking Mrs. Ward with him because neither of us knew what else to do with her.

After a time I had a letter from him saying that he had made good use of the frame at least. He had cut it into sections and sold them to an actress for valances in her sitting-room. The canvas, he added, was rolled up in a corner while he made up his mind what to do about it. More time went by. Then he sent me a postcard. The postman, I noticed, looked a bit startled when delivering it—and small wonder. Scrawled across it in Tanner's big, childish writing was the sinister message : "*I have cut off her hands.*"

Having by this time forgotten all about Mrs. Ward of Madras I was so alarmed that I telephoned him right away to find out what on earth he had been up to. But it was all right. He had not gone berserk and committed a horrible *crime passionel*. He had merely had a brainwave and cut out of the Ward portrait the part that was best executed—e.g., the hands—framed it attractively and sold it at a good price.

Tanner is by no means the first to have profited by an idea of this kind. My wife's family, in more affluent days, owned an enormous oil painting by the Dutch artist Verboeckhoven. This one was about eight feet wide by four feet high and filled an entire wall. It was a pastoral landscape showing a flock of sheep guarded by sheepdogs, with children playing nearby, a windmill on the skyline, farms and villages in the distance, all in the rosy glow of sunset. Falling on hard times they tried to sell it, with no success. Small pictures were the only ones in demand. Finally they took it to a dealer with whom they had had transactions in the past, and he promised them that he would dispose of the picture, and that they would do well out of it, provided that they gave him a free hand to do as he wished. Naturally they did so. He proceeded to chop the canvas into

six or seven pieces, each piece being identifiable as the work of this painter and, of course, an original. He had done it cleverly. The various sections detached from the huge sprawling whole were each a charming little composition showing either some sheep, children playing with the dogs, a windmill or a clump of trees etc. The total result brought some hundred and fifty pounds into the family coffers at a time when it was badly needed.

Take the tip for what it is worth, and if you can't find a good small painting at a price you can afford, then hunt for one of the big, unsaleable old canvases that clutter up any dealer's premises and cut out of it any bit that appeals to you. It may sound like vandalism but I assure you nobody is going to mind except the artist—and he's dead anyway.





## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ANTIQUE NEEDLEWORK

**T**HE twentieth century will probably be recorded in the history books as a period when all classes of persons were enabled by the relaxation of working hours to enjoy more leisure than had ever been known before. Unfortunately, education in the use of leisure time has not proceeded at the same enlightened rate. Most people would not know what to do with themselves without their television sets, radios, cinemas and other forms of canned amusement. The art of conversation, or rather intelligent conversation, because people are still capable of gossiping for hours about trivialities, seems to have died out, and fewer and fewer persons seem to have the ability to read anything more demanding than comic-strip papers and pin-up magazines. The sum total of their intellectual achievements appears to consist of watching futile parlor games or listening to an ex-grocer's boy crooning some moronic song.

How differently controlled were leisure hours in the days of our ancestors—especially our female ancestors. They were trained in the domestic crafts and their recreations were either polite conversation, music or sewing. The craft of needlework was obligatory for most women, not only to fill their leisure hours, but also to produce beautiful soft furnishings for the house and clothes for their own adornment. To these long dead women we owe the treasures of antique needlework which we

are now at such pains to possess, if we can find them. Most ladies, whether high-born or low, were adepts with the needle, and even the little girls tried their apprentice hands at samplers, which had the double effect of keeping them quiet and producing for posterity these quaint and charming examples of eighteenth-century "homework."

The Flemish ladies who made the early tapestries were chroniclers of their times, as well as being expert at their craft. The early lacemakers produced miracles of intricate workmanship—often in dim lighting and without the aid of spectacles; queens and their ladies-in-waiting produced lovely embroideries and exquisite *petit point* and, in fact, it was a most important part of a girl's upbringing that she should be able to sew. Those who are familiar with Henry James' book *Washington Square*, and with the play based on it, *The Heiress*, will recall that it was Catherine Sloper's dexterity with a needle, which so aggravated her father, that was the solace of her lonely life. Today it would seem that many girls are unable to sew on a button or mend a shoulder strap—judging by the number of safety-pins one sees peeping out of their garments.

The history of embroidery dates from very early times. As soon as the human race shed its figleaves it had to have something by way of a covering. It follows that the female, even when she wore rough skin garments, saw to it that they were at least in the fashion and that they were, if possible, better made and more becoming than those of Mrs. Jones in the next cave. From this beginning it is a short step to the invention of the crafts of weaving and spinning and to the making of beautiful ceremonial vestments for ecclesiastical and royal personages and the decoration of churches and palaces with wonderful tapestries.

It is extremely interesting and informative to glance briefly at the history of tapestry and embroidery, much of which forms an integral part of English social history. English needlework and embroidery, from the time of the Anglo-Saxon Kings, through the Norman Conquest to the fourteenth century, enjoyed a considerable reputation throughout the continent of Europe. In fact it was generally regarded as being superior to any other. It is reported by contemporary historians that the jewelled and embroidered cope presented to the Archbishop of Benevento by King Canute was outstanding among ecclesiastical

vestments, and in the thirteenth century a local reporter of the period wrote that Pope Innocent IV, who greatly admired the beauty of the appliqué embroidery on the vestments of some foreign ecclesiastics at his court and learning that they were of English workmanship, exclaimed, "England is truly a garden of delight, an inexhaustible well of riches ; from such an abundance much may be extracted." He thereupon sent letters to the leading English prelates requesting them, if they loved the Church, to supply his choir with similar garments. His wishes were carried out and the Papal choir was robed in vestments covered with gold and precious stones and embroidered with figures, animals and flowers. And it was about this time that Henry III presented to the Bishop of Hereford a cope of red silk worth, then, about £360.

Hand-made tapestries date from about the eleventh century—the Bayeux tapestries probably being the best known. I have an illustration of one of the period which might almost have been made from a modern contemporary design—so fresh and up-to-date does it appear.

The weaving of tapestries on a loom appears to date from about the middle of the fourteenth century and their manufacture seems to have been confined almost entirely to Flanders. It was a jealously guarded secret and it is a curious fact that the English made no attempt to discover it. Most English castles at that time were decorated with tapestries which were part of the spoils of the hundred years' war, and one assumes that it was more convenient to purloin them than be put to the bother of making them.

We read in Shakespeare's *King John* an injunction to one of the characters to "stand thou within the arras." This was a tapestry hanging named after the town of Arras, in Flanders. Chaucer makes some mention of tapestry ; and in the latter part of the fourteenth century Richard II, in an inventory of Warwick Castle, mentions a set portraying the life of the mythical hero, Guy of Warwick.

It was not until 1619, in the reign of James I, that the first English tapestry factory was started at Mortlake. This factory, which lasted for about one hundred years, was the only recorded attempt of any importance to introduce tapestry as a national art in Britain.

Not long ago I visited Forde Abbey, near Ilchester, to see a

set of Mortlake tapestries. Forde Abbey, belonging to Mr. Trevor Roper, is one of the loveliest homes in England and one of the few medieval monasteries left virtually intact by Cromwell. The tapestries are housed in a room which is an architectural masterpiece. It is a perfect double cube and makes an ideal setting for these seventeenth-century works of art which look as fresh and colorful as the day they were made.

The making of lace is one of the most ancient of crafts. Its history dates from the early Egyptians and it is probably a development of the embroidered and openwork ornament on clothing of the early dynasties. The industry appears to have filtered through Egypt and Palestine to Greece and Italy, where it settled mainly in Venice. In the Middle Ages Venice became famous for lacework, and as the industry moved eastward it spread over Belgium and France and, eventually, owing to religious persecution in the sixteenth century, foreign craftsmen came to England and set up centers in Buckinghamshire and at Honiton in Devon.

A single piece of antique hand-made lace represents, according to its size, anything from days to years of patient devoted labor.

The study of antique lace needs a great deal of patience—in fact, almost as much as it took to make the original article. One has to try and find out whether the specimen is hand- or machine-made, its approximate date of manufacture and the country of origin.

Hand-made lace is distinguishable by button-hole stitches, uneven net ground and difficulty in unravelling threads; its age is determined by the fact that machine-made thread did not appear until the middle of the eighteenth century. Hand-spun threads were no longer than about twenty inches, for the worker could stretch no farther from her distaff and had to break the thread and join again. (I have made a test of this on our own spinning-wheel, which is reputed to date from the seventeenth century, and can verify this statement.) If, for instance, you unravel a piece of thread and it is, say, thirty inches long, then it is undoubtedly machine-made. There are technical differences in the making of the various types of lace which I do not feel competent to explain as I am not a natural born needleman and call down the direst contempt from my wife if I even attempt to darn a sock.

It is only by careful study of specimens of lace that one can learn the countries of origin and this is a matter of examining pieces in museums and collections. Only after some time, I fear, will the amateur be able to recognise the subtle differences between Valenciennes, Alençon, Argentan, Brussels and Venetian laces. But I must add that the possession of only one piece of genuine old lace, whether you have identified it or not, is as much an artistic delight as would be the ownership of a Kaendler figure or a Ming horse. If you do have an old piece, make sure that it is kept in a warm dry place, preferably in a box or drawer lined with satin pasted on to the wood. Never glue it to colored silk or paper, as is sometimes recommended, and keep it in a frame. It cannot again be used for its original purpose of personal adornment and the application of the glue destroys the filmy fabric.

It is only within the last fifty years or so that the attention of the collector has been attracted by needlework pictures and the delightful samplers of the eighteenth century. Needlework pictures date from about the Stuart period and are worked with silk on coarse, irregularly woven, brownish linen canvas in a fine slanting stitch taken over a single thread. This is technically known as "tent-stitch," or more familiarly, *petit point*. These embroidered pictures bore some resemblance to tapestry and were probably suggested by the old woven pictures. Later on, the simple stitching was elaborated by the use of metallic threads and some portions were raised.

Of the same epoch we have what was called "stump-work" in which the principal figures are raised by a padding of hair or wool and the padding completely concealed with closely worked stitches or with embroidered satin. The subjects usually consisted of the King and Queen with their Court, Biblical incidents or mythological stories, and any blank spaces in the design are filled up with strange beasts and birds and enormous flowers, generally unknown to the botanist. The pictures gradually became more elaborate and seed pearls, spangles, peacocks' feathers and paste diamonds were used as decorations. Sometimes real hair was used for the wigs and beards, and grassy banks and foliage were represented by means of ravelled out gimp and knotted silk.

There are not many genuine examples of Stuart stump-work to be found today apart from those which had been carefully

preserved. The fabrics were highly regarded by generations of moths, and damp and mould have taken their toll. But those specimens of Charles I and Charles II stump-work which can be seen today are fascinating reminders of the times in which they were made and a great tribute to the industry and patience of the needlewomen who made them.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries produced much excellent needlework. Queen Mary, the wife of William III, used to make fringe, and in Queen Anne's time the ladies devoted much of their leisure to working chair seats, cushion covers and pole-screens. A friend of mine has two lovely pole-screens which have been converted into side tables. I imagine that the poles had been damaged and discarded but the screens were intact. They had been mounted on modern lacquered bases by a local craftsman, and make two of the most charming little tables I have ever seen.

Probably samplers are the most sought after of all forms of old needlework. A sampler, from "exemplar," or pattern of work, was the form of needlework produced by the children of the house. Usually it consisted of the alphabet, a rhyme or religious text, and is signed with the child's name and the date. I have only one of these charming items, but it is quite unique in its own way. It is too long to quote but the little girl who made it left out the letter "n" in the word "thing" so that it reads "thig." Moral: Be very careful of your spelling when writing in needlework because you can't correct the mistake without unpicking the whole "thig."

If you are searching for something unusual in the way of needlework pictures you may find that American mourning pictures will attract you. These usually depict a figure or figures in a garden by a funeral urn, which bears the name and date of death of the deceased. These are finely embroidered in delicate shades and are extremely precious and elegant. There are also French religious pictures—rather like samplers—with beautifully worked religious symbols, crowns, lambs, angels etc. There is a shop in one of the arcades in London which has an excellent collection of these which is well worth a visit.

Nineteenth-century pictures in needlework are not so highly prized as those of an earlier period. Of these the most important are the large, gaudily drawn Scriptural pictures worked in silk,

wool and chenille on sarsenet, the groups of flowers in cloth and silk *appliquéd*. There are also other pictures of this period worked on canvas (originally intended as chair seats) done in tent-stitch in wools and decorated with beads. Although the colors in the wool may be faded the beads will have kept their color. They are quite elegant and can be cut down to make small cushions or tea cozies. I have seen some worked in charming designs of lilies and roses with bows of forget-me-nots.

It is essential that old needlework pictures should be framed as it is not advisable to keep them in drawers or portfolios where they may become frayed or rubbed. Where the work is raised the frame should be deep enough to permit the picture to be kept away from the glass. This can be done by the insertion of small slips of wood. And if the old backing is perished because of worm in the wood, or for any other reason, do not re-strain the picture on a new stretcher or backing board. It is obvious that this may damage the picture. The new board should be covered with linen on to which the picture should be sewn. It makes a nice touch to cover the board with a dark colored velvet, dark green or crimson for preference, and to allow a margin to be visible round the picture.

Frames, wherever possible, should be of the period. Of course, finding old frames is probably even more difficult than finding the pictures. But old frames can be copied. Stuart pictures should be framed in black, in ebony-stained mahogany, which is the best modern equivalent of the pear-wood of the antique frames. Eighteenth-century pictures look best in gold frames, with black and gold borders painted on the glass or, if this is not possible, black frames with narrow gold inner beadings can be used. Nothing can be done to restore colors which have faded. But first make sure that they have faded and are not merely obscured by dust. If the latter, brushing with a soft brush will often work wonders. Ammonia can be used to brighten metallic threads. It is possible also that a discreet use of soap suds might help where ingrained dirt is the trouble, although I have never tried to clean old fabrics of such delicacy. We have used carpet cleaner on a Persian rug with considerable advantage.

There are other fields for the collector of old needlework in embroidered Georgian waistcoats, for instance, of which many

beautiful examples are still to be found ; fans, once an essential adjunct to a lady's wardrobe—many of which were made of lace or embroidery—and patchwork quilts which are useful as well as being extremely fashionable at the present time. Old costumes, clothing of various periods—a lady I know collects Victorian underclothes—the list is almost endless. But one cannot collect everything. The small collector should concentrate on one objective only. As a suggestion to someone wishing to make a start in a modest way I would propose Victorian wool pictures. Unlike other things I have mentioned these are by no means rarities—I have seen many of them around at tempting prices. It is true that some of them, though cleverly worked, are—as compositions—ugly. The success of these productions depended as much on the worker's artistic gifts as on her prowess as a needlewoman, and in the former respect some ladies, alas, fell lamentably short. You will see dumpy little cottages with conventional spikes of lupins and hollyhocks beside the door and careful avoidance of any kind of human or animal figure—too difficult to do. But in the marine subjects it is, oddly enough, their very stiffness and ineptitude which is so charming. Absurd little sailing ships placed on rows of even wavelets like a crinkly “perm” are entirely delightful.

In cases where the artistry was above average the results could be surprising. I once saw in a house I was visiting a portrait which had been executed about seventy years ago by the owner's aunt. Nobody knew who the sitter was. It was thought to have been a governess who had once been in the service of the family. If the likeness were true I doubt if the young woman would long have remained a governess. She had a most beautiful and arresting face, it haunts me still—and such was the skill of the artist that it seemed to stand out from the frame and to have actual form and texture. This picture hung in a dark angle half-way up the main staircase, and it was not until you went right up close to it that you could see it was not painted but worked entirely in wools. I was quite dumbfounded and took my hostess to task for not displaying to better advantage what was, to my thinking, a considerable work of art. Her reply rebuked me soundly for my stupidity. “If I had hung it where strong light could reach it,” she said, “the wools would have faded long ago and you might have passed it by without noticing it at all.” So, should you decide to collect wool pictures and

can find good specimens which are unfaded you must remember to take care of them in this respect.

I have heard it said that if you look hard enough you can find almost anything you need within half a mile of your front door. And I have certainly discovered this to be true when I have been stuck for a reference or some item of information in connection with my work. The number of people who are experts on a particular subject, even in this one area, is astonishing. We have an archæologist, a scientist, a famous historian, a choreographer, an author whose special field is the Middle Ages and who is as fluent in the language of Chaucer as we are in that of the present day. We even had until recently the Clarenceux King of Arms, the late Sir Archibald Russell. It was a comfort to be able to ask him, as we had to do once when the local amateurs were presenting a play of my wife's, "Please, what were the arms of Berengaria of Navarre?" and to be given all details of the correct heraldic device within three minutes. And if it is a matter of an obscure Shakespearian quote, I have only to ring up my friend Miss Knight, a retired schoolmistress who lives close by, for the context and she replies without even a fragmentary pause for reflection, "*King John*, act III, scene 1."

This being the case I had no doubt whatever that if I circulated an appeal for useful data for my chapter on antique needlework I should not have to wait long before some helpful soul turned up with something. Sure enough, I received a letter from a lady on the outskirts of the village asking if I would be interested in some old-fashioned knitting. If so, she had something she would like to show me. I discussed this with my wife and we decided that since it is done on needles some mention of knitting would not be out of place in a chapter on "needlework." We also decided that it would be better for Nina to go, she being more likely to appreciate what the lady was talking about. Knitting is not one of my accomplishments. Tanner, a bachelor of many years standing, has learned to make his own socks, and the last time he was here he tried to teach me. It was simple, he said. All I can say is that if sock-making is simple then I must be the most block-headed oaf alive. By the time I had done a few rounds I had driven my wife into hysterics and got myself and the cat snarled up in about ten miles of yarn and nearly strangled the pair of us.

Anyway, an appointment was made and this was the outset of a friendship struck up between my wife and a very remarkable old lady whom I will call, since she has a rooted objection to anything in the nature of publicity, by the fictitious name of Miss Hitchcock. She had, said Miss Hitchcock, some examples of the work of her grandmother who had been renowned for her knitted bedspreads. This did not sound very promising. My wife had in mind some horrid expanse made up of odds and ends of wool. But she received a shock when, after tea, a cot cover was produced which was one of the most marvellous things she had ever seen. It was knitted in crochet cotton, on needles so fine that you could count fourteen stitches to the inch, and in a pattern whose intricacy and beauty was almost beyond description. Miss Hitchcock explained that it was called star pattern, on account of the regularly placed raised "stars" which stood out in relief. As a little girl, she added, she used to wind the balls of cotton for her grandmother who seemed to be eternally knitting—and small wonder. The labor involved in making one of these exquisite things must have been staggering. Another cot cover shown to my wife was made in "shell" pattern—and again the complexities of it baffled description. Not only tireless industry and keen eyesight but tremendous powers of concentration must have been needed.

Miss Hitchcock had still more to show—but this time, alas, only fragments. Some half a dozen strips and one corner section were all that remained of a full-sized quilt in yet another beautiful pattern. It had been cut up for bathmats by some unspeakable character whose ears, if she is still living, I hope will burn if ever she reads this book.

When Nina came home she could not stop talking about the wonderful quilts and said she would give anything to own one.

"Well," said I with typical male crassness, "why don't you ask the old lady if she'll sell you one?"

"I know she won't. She regards them as heirlooms. And in any case she hasn't got one big enough for a double bed."

Nina's lucky star must have been in the ascendant when she made that remark. A little later she invited the old lady to tea but Miss Hitchcock was, at the last minute, unable to come. Her sister in Wiltshire had died and she had been called in to help clear up the effects. When she returned to her cottage she telephoned my wife to say that in a trunk among her sister's

belongings she had found another knitted quilt, a large one this time, which her grandmother had made for her mother's trousseau and which was therefore nearly a hundred years old.

"I have no use for it myself and very little room to keep things here," she added, "and as you have taken such an interest in these old things I have been wondering if you would like to have it." My wife, in telling this story, says that she nearly dropped the telephone receiver and could only stammer her delighted acceptance.

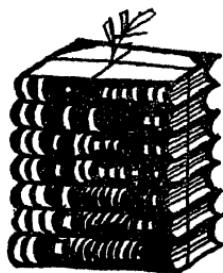
And so now the wonderful quilt (more properly it is a bedspread and not a quilt) is displayed to its full extent on our double divan, replacing the patchwork one which was on it when the photograph was taken. Made in a diamond pattern, it is ten feet square and bordered with what looks like crocheted lace, but in fact, every stitch has been knitted. By comparison with the manufactured candlewick quilts which are so popular today and so expensive it is a treasure indeed and by rights should be in a museum. Apart from one or two small repairs it shows little sign of its great age. My wife has since acquired from Miss Hitchcock one of the star-pattern strips with which she is going to re-cover the headboard to complete the effect. Wherever her spirit may be, I think that Miss Hitchcock's grandmother might like to know that these products of her industrious fingers are so admired and cherished.

If the foregoing has roused your interest in some of the old handicrafts you will be glad to know that the Royal School of Needlework has revived and is now teaching them. In the United States classes are becoming popular too.

You may also like to know that living within a short distance of us is a lady—her name is Erma Harvey James—who is doing what her ancestors did. She has evolved a kind of needlework picture stamped with her own individual style and taste, which in this case is modernistic. An exhibition of her work was recently held in London and attracted a lot of attention. For the benefit of those who did not go to see it I will try to describe the technique employed. A drawing is made on canvas or linen, usually an impressionist design of some intricacy. Pieces of velvet and rich brocade are used for solid filling where the artist considers necessary, and then the outlines are worked in feather stitch or chain stitch in thread of many colors and often

gold and silver. Over this is laid a fine net, in black or white as the case may be, and then the final decoration—which consists of sequins, jet, paste or glass beads, bugles, anything lustrous or sparkling—is sewn on. The result is as if, instead of wearing a jewel on your person, you had hung it on the wall. These small pictures—they have to be small or the effect would be overdone—are called “collages,” and they are completely enchanting and already beginning to be sought after by collectors. There will never be a great many in circulation for they take so long to make. I shouldn’t be surprised if they figure in a book on antique needlework current in the next century.





## CHAPTER NINE

### BOOKS

**D**OCTOR JOHNSON is reputed to have said that the man who is tired of London is tired of life. I do not think that observation would hold good today. Although I was born in London, lived there for some forty odd years and once considered there was nowhere in the world to equal it, I now find it a city to get in and out of as quickly as possible. Perhaps *I* am tired of life. But I don't think so. I find the country has so much more to offer in the way of simple living and companionship that I never want to live in a city again. I would therefore amend the learned doctor's remark by saying that the man who is tired of *books* is tired of life. You will observe that I have not said "tired of reading." Owning or collecting books is not quite the same thing as reading them. I have many books which I have never even opened—I am going to one day, of course, but am reserving that pleasure for exactly the right moment and the proper mood. Also, one may buy a book with an excessively dreary text but with an exquisite binding.

In my view, no home is complete without books. A room without one or two volumes scattered about always looks unlived-in. No doubt with the increase in popularity of television we shall in time lose all capacity for reading and contemplation and will have a corps of unctuous Big Brothers boozing out endless serials which we shall be compelled to

watch. I own a radio set, it is true, but it possesses a most valuable little knob which, when turned in the right direction, allows me to relegate a fatuous program to the silence from which it should never have emerged.

Book collecting is rather more personal than any other branch of the fine arts. And one does not need a long purse to enable one to own a modest library. Only the other day a friend of mine bought a beautiful early set of Sir Walter Scott's novels for a pound. Scott has apparently gone out of fashion. But his work may become popular again one day and this set of some thirty volumes will then be worth much more than the price paid. At the moment they make a handsome addition to his bookshelves and if they were to be bought new in their present binding could not possibly be produced for less than about thirty shillings each.

Even the millionaire is not able to buy all the books he covets for the simple reason that they are not available for him to purchase. For instance, I believe that there are only two copies of the first edition of *Hamlet*, both imperfect. One of these is in the British Museum and it is doubtful if all the money in the world would buy that particular copy.

The first point about book collecting is that you should concentrate on a subject in which you are interested, and the reason is that a collection of books on one particular subject is usually more valuable than single volumes pertaining to widely different fields of interest. In the beginning you will have to rely upon the services of booksellers to help you but gradually, if you are sufficiently interested, you will become your own consultant. Many booksellers, apart from the true antiquarian, have to spread their knowledge thinly over their whole stock and you may find yourself becoming an expert in your own subject. It also happens that an antique or junk shop will dispose of books acquired in the course of sale-going or other dealing and in these cases the shopkeepers may know little or nothing about the books they have for sale. I know one dealer who advertises the fact that he is an antiquarian bookseller. This statement may be literally true in the sense that he sells old books, but he has himself admitted to me that he has never read a book right through in his life. No doubt he is exaggerating, but he is the first to admit that he hasn't much idea of the intrinsic or artistic

value of his stock of books. He knows what he pays for them and that is really the only guide he has to the selling price. I am afraid that he is going to have most of his books until he dies. The best way for him to get rid of 90 per cent of his stock would be for him to put outside his shop a number of boxes and price his books from a penny upwards, according to condition. As it is, one finds in his shop worthless books outrageously priced and comparatively rare volumes which can be bought cheaply. I once discovered there a first edition, in mint condition, of a book which was once banned and which is now quite valuable. I could have bought it for a shilling or two, but I didn't want it and thought it only fair to proffer advice as to the selling price. One day this dealer may have a book I do want, so I must confess that my gesture was not quite so altruistic as it sounds.

Choice of subject depends naturally upon one's own interests. There are several subjects which interest me, and I have therefore much to look for in the way of books whenever I attend a sale or go to a strange town. My main pre-occupation at the moment is in trying to find copies of the *Strand Magazine* in which were published the Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. This means that I want copies of this magazine bound in light blue with the famous picture of the Strand on the cover. So far I have all the twenty-four "Adventures," the whole of "The Return," and "The Hound of the Baskervilles." The remainder of the stories were scattered over about twenty-five years and I am finding it much more difficult to complete the collection than it was to begin it. Had I been content with odd bindings I should nearly have finished my task. But many of the regular subscribers to the magazine had their volumes bound to their own choice and, however expensive these bindings, they are not what I require. I expect that if I were to advertise I might get some, but this is taking the easy way out. It would take away from me the pleasure of finding what I want in unexpected places. Also, I want to get them cheaply. My top price per volume is seven shillings. I once found two at a jumble sale which I bought for threepence each.

At one time, fired by the example of John Burns, I began to collect books on London. Burns, who had a wonderful collection which fetched a good deal when it was sold, found most of his books on junk stalls and in second-hand shops in the days when

nearly every bookshop had a penny or twopenny box in which was thrown all the junk. He had also the advantage of being able to shop in London's old Booksellers' Row which was situated in Wych Street and Holywell Street, part of the old Clare Market area which was demolished when the Royal Courts of Justice and Kingsway were built at the turn of the century. The old Caledonian market used also to be a happy hunting ground for the bibliophile, but one now has to find new sources of supply.

My collection of books on London ceased to interest me after a time. I had chosen a field which was then pretty well explored by a number of people and it was becoming increasingly difficult to find the books I wanted at the price I was prepared to pay. I had done fairly well. I had an early copy of *Stow's Survey, Timb's Curiosities of London*, several books on old London Bridge and much interesting material on old monuments and churches. I also had four very rare volumes which contained some wonderful plates and prints of Whitehall Palace. These I discovered in a bookshop in York Road, Waterloo, during the war when most of my lunch-times were devoted to a search for books. I sold my collection retaining only Walford's *Old and New London*, a fairly modern work which has been invaluable for reference purposes. I have now transferred my topographical allegiance to the county of Dorset, and have several useful and one or two rare volumes. I have not secured the great prize—Hutchins's *History of Dorset*, third edition in four volumes—as this is an expensive work and usually fetches anything from twenty to thirty pounds in the salesroom. I do not yet want it badly enough to pay that price, because I can always consult it in the local library, and I may one day get a set cheaply.

My other major interests in the way of books are, at the moment, collections of detective stories; old volumes of plays and early Victorian books containing color prints. Among the latter I have *Life in Ireland, the Rovings, Rambles and Sprees of Brian Boru Esq.*, Pierce Egan's *Life in and out of London* and *The Three Tours of Dr. Syntax*. The value of these books lies in their beautiful color prints by such artists as Rowlandson and George Cruikshank in one of the best periods of English caricature. Some people buy these books solely for the color prints which they remove and frame, but this seems to me to

be sheer vandalism and I think it is wicked to tear out the prints and thus spoil a beautiful and complete work.

Among my volumes of plays I have copies of those produced at the Haymarket and Drury Lane Theatres in the eighteenth century, and these include some of the early prompt copies. I also have what is, to some extent, a literary rarity. This is one volume of *Shakespeare's Plays*, printed in 1709. The interesting thing about this book is that it contains, as well as *Anthony and Cleopatra* and other authentic works, *The London Prodigal*, *Thomas, Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *The Puritan*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *Locrine*, all plays which were at that time attributed to Shakespeare.

This brings me to an important point in book collecting. As a general rule it should be said that books printed after the middle of the seventeenth century are not in themselves of value merely because they are old. Before 1640 the number of books printed was so few that any found today must have some value regardless of the text. The history of printed books began in England when Caxton published the first printed book in 1477, and during the ensuing two hundred years it is said that only about 20,000 books were printed in England. After that date there was a flood of books of all kinds, many of which have no literary or antiquarian value and are worth not more than a few pence. It was the fashion at one time to print volumes of incredibly dull sermons and one is always discovering these long-winded relics of past pomposity mouldering away in bookshops.

One must therefore from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards look for first and limited editions, fine bindings and other facets of book production which, in themselves, provide antiquarian value.

I have one book which I doubt if I have opened more than once or twice. It is a collected edition of the poems of Shelley—not one of my favorite poets and I can find all I want of him in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. But the binding of this book is so exquisite that it is in itself an artistic delight. It is bound in mauve leather and the spine is richly tooled in gold. The book is now exactly 102 years old but is in such pristine condition that it might have come from the bookbinders only yesterday. Its companions on the shelf are a copy of Chaucer and the plays of Massinger and Ford, both of these in

amber leather with gold tooling. The three together make as handsome and dignified an example of the bookbinder's art as a man could wish to own.

Your hobby may be the theatre. In this case not only will old copies of plays be of interest to you but you will search for any book which has any connection with the theatre at all. Thus, at once, a very wide field is thrown open to you. There are books of historical interest on old theatres, on costume, works of biography and criticism and, in fact, on almost endless by-products of the main subject. A small library could be built up solely on London theatres which have now disappeared, the plays performed in them and the personalities who have appeared on their stages. How many people know, for instance, the site of the Princess's Theatre in Oxford Street or that of the Olympic Theatre? At which theatre was the first Gilbert and Sullivan opera produced? Where was the West London Theatre and what is it used for now? When one has tracked down the answers to these queries (I could supply them but I won't) then one immediately begins to be interested in other old theatres and a fascinating new vista appears before one, not only from the point of view of acquiring knowledge but from that of collecting books bearing on the subject.

Similarly, if you are keen on sports there are many old and rare books on golf, hunting, cricket, archery and real tennis—the latter being an ancient sport played at Hampton Court Palace in the days of Henry VIII. History and travel are other fascinating subjects and one can build up a small collection of books on the life and times of a particular personage. For instance, Josephine Tey must have had great fun when she was doing the research for her detective novel about Richard III, *The Daughter of Time*, which is one of the most intelligent and enjoyable detective stories I have ever read.

Here again you have a wide field of choice—that is, if you enjoy detective stories or anything relating to crime. You can start right away with the expurgated version of the *Apocrypha*, which contains what is probably the first recorded example of pure detection, and track the development of the detective story through the ensuing centuries. The path will lead you through the whole field of literature up to the comparatively modern times of Charles Dickens and Edgar Allan Poe, who really began

the great flood of detective stories and thrillers which has continued to the present day. You will find that your researches will take you outside English literature and you will want to possess early editions of O. Henry and almost certainly a copy of *The Memoirs of Eugène Vidocq*, published in France in 1829, upon which Poe is said to have drawn for some of his inspiration. And, of course, there are innumerable books which have a bearing on this particular subject—the detectives' bible, *Criminal Investigation* by Hans Gross, famous trials, books on criminal psychology, on forensic medicine—first editions of Conan Doyle and other writers such as G. K. Chesterton, author of the classic Father Brown stories, and countless others.

You may decide that you will look for something unusual—or at least, difficult, such as for instance, the first serial versions of novels which have later been published in book form. The obvious examples which spring to one's mind are the monthly issues of *Pickwick*, *Copperfield* and other Dickens' works. *Pickwick* first appeared in blue-covered monthly issues in the years 1836-7. They were illustrated by Seymour, Buss and, later, by Phiz. They are now very rare and command high prices. But they are worth looking for as it is not impossible that there may still be copies tucked away in someone's attic or hidden behind piles of dusty newspapers in an out-of-the-way junk shop.

Once, when searching through the back regions of a bookshop, I came across hundreds of these blue issues. I was in a fever because I thought I had made a wonderful discovery. I spent some time sorting the piles into the proper order. Part four of *Dombey and Son* was mixed up with *Oliver Twist* and so on. I had visions of staggering out of the shop with armfuls of treasure. The good lady who owned the shop was asking a flat rate of one shilling for each copy and I was on the point of counting the number of copies and writing out a cheque when I looked at the date of publication. Alas, they were all issued in the 1870's. They were reprints and worth nothing more than their interest value—five shillings ought to have bought the lot. So, very sadly, I left them for the discomfiture of some other deluded bibliophile.

It is interesting to note that serial versions of Dickens' novels in his own publication, *Household Words*, seem to have no value at all. I have some volumes of this magazine containing *A Child's History of England*, *Hard Times*, and some early work by

Wilkie Collins, which seem to be a dead loss so far as the book collector is concerned.

Dickens' first editions, that is, the first publication in book form, are not very expensive. I have seen very good copies offered at anything from about fifteen shillings to three pounds. But I have never bought any because, to me, they are not really first publications. Also the print is usually very small and I prefer to read my Dickens in later editions which are printed in larger and clearer type. In this particular sense, therefore, I am not a collector, but merely own books which I like to read without serious damage to my eyesight.

You may like to collect old books on navigation, the sciences, natural history, or you may like to own early copies of the fathers of the English novel—Smollett, Fielding and Richardson. There are, too, the Victorian novelists whose vast output of work ran to three volumes per novel. There is also much interest in early copies of boys' books, magazines and "penny dreadfuls," all of which, as well as being scarce, are an interesting sidelight on the past.

First editions of modern works generally hold their value, although this naturally fluctuates according to prevailing likes and dislikes. But Shaw, Galsworthy, Bennett, Hardy, Kipling, Barrie, Wells, Conan Doyle and Somerset Maugham are authors whose "firsts" are well worth looking for.

In short, the world of books offers much to the collector, not only in the way of possessions but also as a source of much personal pleasure in an age which is too dependent on radio and television as a means of intellectual fulfilment. There are obvious snags, naturally enough, for the beginner. Nobody can start from scratch with limited knowledge and little money and immediately acquire rare and valuable books. The rich man can as easily buy a whole library as he would a suit of clothes. But this always seems so very dull that I, for one, would not want to do it however rich I was. My books, like my other antiques, have now taken on an individuality of their own. Each has a history in the sense that I have searched and found it, often in the face of severe competition. They are old friends who have beguiled many a tedious moment. The beginner will certainly have to make friends with a bookseller, of whom there are many only too anxious and willing to be helpful. Naturally

they are in the trade to make money and they will want to make it out of you if they can. This is only fair, and it is therefore up to you to buy only what you want at prices you can afford. Most booksellers occasionally have time to spare to talk about their wares to a customer who is interested, and they will offer advice which you may take or leave as you think fit. I am excluding those predatory individuals who simply regard books as so much merchandise and wish to get as much money for them as they can, regardless of their merit. I had one experience with a dealer which considerably shook my faith in the inherent goodness of mankind in general and dealers in particular.

I was at a private house sale and some hundreds of books were up for disposal. As is customary at many such sales the auctioneer had not attempted to evaluate the books but had made them up into lots just as they had come off the shelves. The lots varied in size according to the number of books on each shelf and each lot contained anything from twenty-five to a hundred volumes. There were only two books I wanted—they were both collections of detective stories—and they were in the same lot. I had no wish to be saddled with a large number of books I had no use for, so I suggested to the book dealers that in consideration of my not bidding against them I should be allowed to buy the two books I wanted. This is quite legitimate practice, as for all I knew there might be a number of bidders interested in the same lot. In which case it was up to me to try and buy the books from whoever made the highest bid. In the event the lot was knocked down to one of these book dealers for ten shillings. During the lunch-time break I went up and asked if I might have the two books, which I then picked out as I had not previously disclosed what they were. The dealer, without even looking at the titles, asked me fifteen shillings for them. Needless to say I was very cross and made a few acid and pertinent comments to the effect that I saw no reason why I should make him a present of the remainder of the books in the lot *plus* five shillings. He made some sort of shamefaced reply that he had had to pay out his colleague with whom he had formed a ring and that he had therefore had to pay considerably more than ten shillings. I was so disgusted that I threw the books down and stalked away in dudgeon. Now, the point here is that I should have been willing to pay six or seven shillings for the books but no more, as neither of

them was in very good condition, one being ex-library and the other a cheap reprint. But I was not willing to be taken for a fool. However, one day I shall come up against this dealer again at a sale and when I do, I shall have quite an interesting little game with him. I shall run him up unmercifully for some lot he badly wants.

One result of this salutary lesson was that when I next went to a sale I made sure that I got the books I wanted. This was in Dorchester and I was after a collection of smuggling books, as well as several books on Dorset which had formed part of the library of an acquaintance who had recently died. The books had been made up into huge lots although, fortunately, there had been some effort at classification and all those I wanted were in the same bundle. But I viewed with some dismay the prospect of staggering home some thirty miles from Dorchester, like an old man of the sea, with a hundredweight of books on my back. I had only brought with me a small case to carry my lunch and any modest number of books I was lucky enough to buy.

I bought the lot for about fifty-five shillings and picked out those I wanted, which included an out-of-print volume of theatrical criticism by A. B. Walkley, the great *Times* dramatic critic, and one or two more books on the theatre. The remainder I sold on the spot to a book dealer, which meant that my dozen or so books had cost me in the region of thirty shillings. When I had finished with those on smuggling—I only wanted them for an article I was writing—I sold them at a profit. So on the whole I had not done badly. This story, of course, has a point; this being that it is nearly always possible to dispose of unwanted items in a lot, either to a dealer or by leaving them for the auctioneer to sell in a future sale.

There are one or two general rules to keep in mind about book collecting. It is advisable never to buy a book which is imperfect unless it is quite impossible to obtain a good copy. If you want it purely for the text, then its condition is not of so much importance. But even so it is very much pleasanter to read a clean copy rather than an old relic with its pages stuck together with jam. If you do have to buy a bad copy of a favorite book try and replace it. One of my favorite fiction writers is John P. Marquand, whom I regard as the

greatest living American satirical novelist. I have most of his novels, although one of them was in such a shabby condition that I was ashamed to keep it with its fellows. I say was, because not long ago I bought an almost new copy in a junk shop for ninepence. I was so delighted that I immediately bought at the same shop a plated mustard pot and a salt cellar, both with Bristol blue glass liners. As I only paid four shillings for the two I considered that I had had a most successful afternoon, especially as I should have been more than willing to have paid a good price for the novel, which I badly wanted.

Try, if you can, to get the books you want in the original binding. Rebinding often destroys much of the intrinsic value although it cannot, of course, ruin the contents. You must also distinguish between impressions. Thus, an edition comprises all copies of a book printed from one setting of type, while an impression forms only part of an edition. A first edition is the first printing and this is also the first impression. Later impressions do not rank as part of the first edition in the view of the collector.

I have refrained so far from mentioning books of reference. These may form part of your library as books needed for your work or your hobby, or they may be collector's items. In either case, make quite sure they are what you want. Reference books are generally expensive—I have already mentioned that I had to pay five pounds for a rather shabby second-hand copy of Chaffers' *Marks and Monograms on Pottery and Porcelain*—and I never buy a reference book unless it is absolutely necessary for my work or valuable in itself as a rare book. Most reference works, such as the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, are to be found in public libraries. As a general rule I would say that good reference books are invaluable to the collector while bad ones are worse than useless.

In this connection I once bought for a few shillings a collection of old magazines and miscellaneous junk at the tail end of a sale. Many were the glances of amused pity which were turned in my direction as I put in a strong bid of ten shillings for what appeared to be absolute rubbish. This was a classic case of buyers not looking at the goods or not recognizing their value when they saw them. Stuffed between old newspapers and what was, admittedly, some very definite rubbish were copies of the *Illustrated London News* commemorating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the Coronation of King Edward VII and the

Coronation of King George V. They were in beautiful condition, never apparently having been taken out of their original tissue, and have been invaluable to me as reference works—especially when I have been writing articles connected with a royal subject. Moreover, they are all magnificent examples of the printer's art with some wonderful work in color.





## CHAPTER TEN

### MISCELLANEA

}} HAD meant to head this chapter "General Bric-à-brac." But after I had written the words they looked so peculiar that I sat and goggled at them. It sounded like the name of some mysterious brass-hat responsible for supplying an army with items like Brushes (button), Pails (slop), Pegs (tent), Nibs (pen), etc. Concentrating on the term "bric-à-brac" itself, I thought, "What on earth does it mean?" Looking it up I discovered that it derives from the French *marchand de bric-à-brac*, meaning a seller of old nails, screws and hinges, which in modern usage has come to mean a collector of curiosities.

There is a tantalizing quotation from Aldritch to the effect that: "A man with a passion for bric-à-brac is always stumbling over antique bronzes, intaglios, mosaics and daggers of the time of Benvenuto Cellini." With respect to the author I would suggest that this is putting it a bit too high. But perhaps the chances were better at the time he was writing; he may actually have known someone who picked up a Cellini dagger in a street market. I myself have met a woman who found in the Portobello Road a Chinese kylin of the Sung dynasty which is now in a museum. And I have also shaken the hand of a man who told me that he had bought off a street barrow a piece of laboratory apparatus weighing several ounces which was sold to him as lead but which he subsequently found to be made of platinum.

In the days before the war I used to spend hours in the

Caledonian Market, or Copenhagen Fields as it used to be called, wandering about and marvelling at the multiplicity of extraordinary objects offered for sale there. This was in my salad days, and I wish now that I could go back twenty years armed with the knowledge I now possess and poke about among the stalls in the "Cally." Maybe I invest this old market with a glamour it did not really have. Maybe there was a mountain of broken beds, chairs and other detritus to every small molehill of something useful or valuable. Personally I never made any finds, except one or two books and a pair of Veldtschoen which lasted me for years and kept my feet dry through many a London winter. And most of the tales one hears about other peoples' discoveries are to be taken with a grain of salt in the absence of corroboration. I can vouch for only one such, and it came from an unimpeachable source—namely my friend Fortunino Matania. He bought in the "Cally" for ninepence a rare black Wedgwood teapot, both old and valuable.

Every old thing has a history attached to it, and I enjoy looking at my various possessions and speculating on the days of their manufacture and the craftsmen who made them.

I think it was Lawrence of Arabia who said that man was happiest without any possessions. He himself, true to his convictions, did not smoke because he would not carry about with him the smoker's paraphernalia of pouch, pipe, matches and so on. But I don't think Lawrence's dictum holds good for many people outside philosophers and hermits. However far we travel in this world, the majority of us want to come back to a home. "Be it never so humble" there's no place like it. And it is the very nature and plenitude of our personal possessions which make it our home and no one else's. Everywhere we turn we see things which, though they may not be either grand or particularly beautiful, are *our* things. They have been handed down to us, or else we have bought them with money which has been hard to earn, and we prize them accordingly. In every home there is an accretion of oddments which one has collected not purposely but accidentally—almost without having been aware of it. Look round your own sitting-room and you will see what I mean. Your eye will fall on something which seems so incongruous—it may be anything from an eighteenth-century candle-snuffer to a fossilized starfish—that you wonder how on

earth you came by it. You rack your brains and then suddenly remember, "Oh yes. Old so-and-so gave it to us." Or, "I picked it up on the beach, that holiday we went to Weymouth."

In between the main furnishings of a house and the oddments which have accrued to it in haphazard fashion are the minor functional things such as clocks, barometers, hearthrugs, pipe-racks, card tables—the list is extensive, but clocks I have put first because they come first in importance. A clock of some kind we must have in these days; but how much nicer if it combines its essential function with the grace and dignity of age. I have a great weakness for old clocks and watches and can play with them for hours. On more than one occasion I have succeeded, in the houses of my friends, in making some old timepiece go when it has not functioned for years. This has earned me a respect which is quite unfounded. I have no specialized knowledge, not even particularly nimble fingers. Usually it is just a matter of adjusting a pendulum or of cleaning and a spot of oil in the right place.

One of my ambitions is to own an old English bracket clock, which I consider one of the handsomest pieces one can have in any home. But these are hard to find at a price to suit my pocket. One does not often see a Webster, a Tompion, a Quare or a Mudge at local auctions. Most of the clocks that find their way into salesrooms are hideous late-Victorian specimens or modern "presentation" clocks that have outlived the recipients. I have one of the latter myself, and you can see it prominently displayed on the mantelshelf in the picture of our living-room. Of its kind it is a very fine clock, in a handsome oak case, and keeps split-second time. It was presented to me by my colleagues at the Board of Trade when I relinquished my post and came to live in Dorset. I had not then developed my all-pervading passion for antiques and when I was asked what I would like to have for a leaving present my thoughts sprang at once to the usual type of presentation clock—that is, a modern one, with an inscription commemorating the event. This is precisely what they gave me and I was duly grateful. I trust my former colleagues will not think the worse of me when I say that I could deal myself several hearty kicks for being such a fool. At precisely the time when my clock was being bought for me—and it cost a good deal of money—there was for sale in an antique shop near my flat in St. John's Wood, as I had often seen

during my rambles round about, an exquisite porcelain mantel clock signed by the great French potter Jacob Petit. It was not ornate and heavily gilded as are many clocks of that period. For decoration it had four flying cupids, two of whom were playing with garlands on the base, while the other two were so modelled that they appeared to be holding the clock face between them. A lovely, lovely thing. The shop was being closed owing to the illness of the proprietor and all the goods were marked down far below their cost or their value. The Jacob Petit clock was going for only a very little more than the sum subscribed for my leaving present. I had only to say the word and I could have had it. For some reason it simply did not occur to me. It goes to show that convention dies hard with us. And, I dare say, I was not really ready to own such a thing at that time. I could see that it was beautiful, but not until I had more knowledge did I realize to the full what a chance I had missed.

It is curious to reflect that the really valuable bracket clocks are those which have not been repaired or renovated since the day they were made. And they are by no means rarities in collecting circles. A friend of mine has one which is in pristine condition after two hundred and fifty years—a fine tribute to the craftsman who made it, and a precious thing to own.

Many attractive old clocks that need repair can be picked up cheaply. Even with the repair bill added to the initial outlay the total is seldom more than the cost of a modern equivalent in a chromium and bakelite case. It is an idea to try and get an antique clock of some kind or other for every room in your house. Among my own favorites is an American mantel clock made in Connecticut (the maker's name and particulars are printed on the back) about a hundred and twenty years ago. The case is mahogany and stands eighteen inches high. It has a glass door charmingly painted in black and gold, a bold, clear face, brass pendulum and an alarm which goes off infallibly when set and would waken the dead. I acquired this from Tanner, and for nothing—which pleases me to reflect upon. He was packing up at the conclusion of one of his visits—a stage which has come to be dreaded by my wife. Invariably Tanner makes the round of local antique shops when he is here and attends any auctions in the neighborhood, and thus he always has an assortment of goods to take back to his shop.

The extent of the assortment depends on how much money he has brought down to "invest." I remember one occasion when he had had a part in a long-running play and was unexpectedly affluent. His wallet bulged with notes and by the time he had made his rounds our local antique dealers were practically bowing to the earth every time they saw him. The spare room he occupied looked like an antique shop itself. Goods of every description—from a pair of Derby vases to a Jacobean cradle—covered the floor, the dressing-table, bed, chairs and window-sills. It was almost impossible to get into the room, let alone dust it or make the bed. I don't know where Tanner slept—probably in the cradle. All this stuff has to be carefully packed for its journey to London; and it is at this stage that Tanner becomes absolutely ruthless. He commandeers every scrap of paper and string, every box, carton and spare suitcase (seldom returned), every bit of rag, sacking and other wrapping material he can lay his hands on. He will even steal my wife's aprons and underclothes unless she mounts guard over them. On this occasion he had made all his preparations for departure. Under his instructions I had staggered out with load after load to his van and I thought the ordeal was over. I was surprised to find, on returning for a last look round in the spare room, that he had left behind this American clock. It had been part of a junk lot he had bought, by mistake, for seven and six.

"I shan't take that rubbishy thing back with me," he said. "My partner wouldn't allow it in the shop. I'll leave it here if you don't mind. You can do what you like with it."

Now I had privately cast rather a covetous eye on this item, and would willingly have offered him the seven and six or more, if he had asked my opinion on it. After he had gone I cleaned and oiled it lovingly, since when it has gone as though it had never stopped. Its loud tick reminds me of duty visits to my grandmother's house when I was a small boy. I was expected to stay to tea and sit and talk to her afterwards. I remember so well the deep ponderous ticking of the clock in her drawing-room which seemed to make the endless afternoon seem even longer. When one is a child time is always endless. It is only when one grows older that the years slip by unnoticed. That is a cliché, I suppose—but anyway I am sure that if my grandmother's clock had had a brisk and cheerful tick those afternoons would not have been so dreary.

I discovered the rest of Tanner's unwanted purchase under the bed, a highly appropriate place for it. It was a small commode. Some commodes are rather charming and are capable of adaptation to other functions ; but this one was about as nasty an example as I have ever come across and I couldn't blame Tanner for deserting it. It was not even made of mahogany, as most of them were, but of stained and varnished pine. I took it to the woodshed intending to chop it up for firewood ; and then I heard that the district nurse was looking for a commode for one of her patients, an old woman who had become an almost total invalid and could not leave her room. I proffered, with some diffidence, the one now known to us as "Tanner's bequest," and when it was accepted with heartfelt gratitude I was never so relieved to see the back of anything.

But to return to clocks. In our bedroom we have a small French carriage clock, and in the kitchen a pendulum clock attached to a blue and white china plate from one of the old German porcelain factories. When I bought this one, as a birthday gift for my wife, it was going beautifully. But about a month later, while I was having a quiet cup of tea in the kitchen with no company but the cat, there was suddenly a clang like a summons to the Day of Judgment. It frightened Wilkins out of his wits and he has never forgiven me—particularly since in addition to his own fright he got a cupful of hot tea slopped over him as a result of mine. What had happened was that the clock had snapped its mainspring. I have not bothered to have it repaired because it occurred to me that a wall clock whose hands can be swivelled around with impunity is a very useful asset to an absent-minded cook like my wife. When she puts a cake in the oven she now sets the hands to whatever time, according to her calculations, it is likely to be done. And this reminds her to take it out. Unless, of course, she forgets to look at the clock. The system is not infallible. Several times, noticing smoke coming out of the oven, I have found a burnt offering and a reproachful stare on the face of the clock.

As a matter of fact clocks are not quite so essential in our house as in other people's, so far as some parts of the day are concerned. The best timekeeper anyone could have is Wilkins. At eight o'clock in the morning, prompt to the minute, he expects to be given his breakfast ; and at six p.m. precisely he is sitting by the refrigerator waiting for his dinner. There is

no possible chance that we shall ever be absorbed in some task to the extent that we neglect him. At five minutes to the hour he seeks us out, wherever we are, and informs us of the time.

The ornate Meissen and Sèvres clocks in ormolu and porcelain with painted panels are, if you have a taste for them, often extremely beautiful. But to my way of thinking they look out of place in any room that has not other pieces of French or Empire furniture. There is one in a neighboring farmhouse—how it got there I can't think—and it looks absurd in a setting of blackened English oak, linoleum and boots.

Whole books could be written, and have been, on the infinite number of articles that used to be made in brass, copper and pewter, including every kind of domestic utensil. No cook would dream of making her preserves in anything but a copper pan, or brewing her wines in anything but the household "copper," which in those days *was* made of copper and not of iron. Travelling tinkers, who were often gipsies, earned their living by mending implements of this ubiquitous metal. It is a great pity, I think, that both copper and brass are losing their appeal except to the antiquarian. There is a warmth and cheerfulness about these metals beyond compare with the sanitary bleakness of chromium and steel.

Many antique copper and brass items were hand-fashioned—not pressed out in a mould at the rate of one a minute. And as collectors well know, these are not likely to decrease in value.

For myself, however, though I like to see the twinkle of brass and copper around a house, I do not care for inglenooks smothered with warming pans, curious archaic toasters and roasters, jugs, skillets, griddles and what not. Outside a museum I believe that old things can, and should, still serve a useful as well as a decorative purpose. This is why I like to have a copper coal scuttle.

We had to wait a long time for ours because we wanted a perfect example, and were not prepared to pay the six or seven pounds which is generally asked for them nowadays. The chance came at a small country house sale which I attended while Nina was at a club meeting. One lot was a black scuttle that looked as if made of japanned tin. But the weight was significant, and

I thought I detected in some places the unmistakable green tinge of old copper. Apparently nobody else had noticed these tell-tale signs, so I was able to buy the scuttle for twenty-five shillings. I bore it home, to be greeted by my wife's anguished wail. "You *know* I didn't want an *iron* one!" I preserved a dignified silence and set to work to clean the thing so as to demonstrate my cleverness. It was a lot more difficult than I'd expected. For days on end I labored with metal polish, paraffin, lemon juice, bath brick, and every far-fetched medium suggested by helpful neighbors—even, as a last resort, spirits of salts. And gradually I managed to rub away the accumulated coat of grime of nearly a hundred years of usage, and there emerged a noble golden-red coal scuttle, as handsome as the day it was made. It even had the date of manufacture and the maker's name. All it now lacks is a copper scoop with a wooden handle which I am sure I shall find some day. The only other copper item we have is a pretty kettle which makes a companion piece to the scuttle in the fireplace. I found this on a rubbish dump—also as black as the ace of spades.

Brass is not to everyone's taste, and it does need much cleaning. Even so, there are many antique brass articles which are useful as well as decorative. Candlesticks and lamps and those handsome fenders with thin wire mesh and top rails of brass which are so much more effective as guards than the modern tiled curb. And there are many very decorative brass fire screens which do a great deal towards brightening up the fireplace on a dull summer's day.

There is much brass to be found in the markets and on the junk stalls which came originally from India. Most of it is Benares ware. Although some of it is quite old I do not think it has a great deal of value and the collector would, I think, be advised to look for some of the old Moorish brasses which have some antiquity and a certain value. Another field for the collector is in the acquisition of horse brasses, and here again one must be quite certain that one is buying old ones and not modern copies of which there are an enormous number about. It takes an expert eye to tell the new from the old, but it helps to handle them; old brass has a softer, quite different "feel."

An interesting offshoot of the acquiring of antique brass is the collection of fascimile pictures of medieval engraved brasses.

These are not very attractive in the rough but when finished and mounted they are objects of much interest and some beauty. The actual rubbing requires care and perseverance although the operation itself is quite simple. The brass to be copied should be cleaned of dust and dirt with a brush and duster, and a large sheet of white paper should be laid evenly over the brass and kept in place with a heavy weight, or several weights. As the brasses are usually fixed to slabs at ground level or on altar tombs this initial preparation does not present much difficulty. The rubbing is done by holding down the paper tightly with the fingers of the left hand and applying a "heel ball" gently but firmly on a small section at a time, rubbing only in one direction. The resulting impression will be grey in color, and to obtain a finished appearance the rubbing must either be laid on a hard and smooth surface and rubbed again so as to get an even black layer, or painted over with Indian or blue-black ink. This latter operation requires some knowledge of brasses to be successfully accomplished. The finished rubbing can be mounted on canvas bound at the sides with tape and stiffened at the ends with wooden laths.

Brass-rubbing can be a fascinating occupation, particularly as some of the engraved brass plates date from the thirteenth century, and one gains not only a knowledge of history but learns a great deal about medieval costumes.

Some of the inscriptions are extremely interesting, like the following :

"Whoever thou shalt be who shall pass, stand, read and lament. I am what thou wilt be, I was what thou art: for me pray I implore. Here lies John Bowthe, formerly Bishop of Exeter, who died the fifth day of the month of April, A.D. 1478."

The metal from which these brasses were made is called "laten," a mixed metal, much harder than later brass and very durable.

There is a convention that beer tastes better in a pewter mug than in any other container. I have a pewter mug but it gives my beer a metallic taste which I find disagreeable. Perhaps this is imagination, but beer in a glass with the light shining on the amber fluid is more aesthetically pleasing to me than in a metal

drinking vessel. Also, I can see whether my beer is clear or not—a very important point.

In any event, I am not greatly attracted to pewter, and although I have picked up one or two pieces I have not bothered to collect it. But, of course, there are connoisseurs who esteem it very highly and will travel miles in search of an old piece.

As the metal was soft and easily dented or bent, not a great deal of really old pewter is to be found, and there are not many specimens about which are earlier than about the seventeenth century. Old pewter should have a mark—that of the Tudor rose—and specially good specimens were marked with a cross. I have a candlestick which I believe to be very old indeed, but as it has lost part of the bottom I have no means of telling its age.

One of the most interesting experiences I have ever had was helping to organize a local exhibition at the time of the Queen's coronation. Its purpose was to gather together objects representative of the home, both past and present, together with coronation souvenirs covering the reigns of former sovereigns. We called it "Royal Occasions and Simple Pleasures." From far and near the exhibits poured in—hundreds of them. One was a doll's house of the time of Queen Anne, standing six feet high with four stories, and equipped with tiny period furniture. Through this I learned that there are collectors of dolls' houses—Mrs. Graham Greene is one—who will travel miles to see a specimen hitherto unknown to them.

We had several musical boxes, of Victorian and earlier dates, including one which played the whole of Weber's "Invitation to the Waltz" if you inserted a penny. Obviously the forerunner of the juke box. We had Georgian embroidered collars, cuffs and waistcoats, beautiful patchwork quilts, autographs, rare maps, fans of ivory, tortoiseshell, silk and parchment, models of the Crystal Palace and other famous buildings made in mediums ranging from matches to icing sugar, musical instruments, lace, tatting and beadwork, coins and medals, playbills, toy theatres, bookplates, shoe buckles and other jewelry, paperweights, dolls of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, old games—including some most curious old packs of playing cards—and, in fact, a bewildering and fascinating array. Some of the things were valuable, others merely interesting. One of the most colorful was a collection of charmingly painted utensils used on the old river barges. But every single one, luckily for us, had

been lovingly cared for in the course of being handed down from generation to generation.

I wish the same could be said of the building in which the exhibition was held. On this site, up to the end of the last century, there stood a house, built and roofed of local stone in the seventeenth century, which was a perfect example of early domestic architecture—what the modern house agent would describe as “a period gem.” It was torn down to make way for an enormous edifice so hideous that it baffles my powers of description but which was better suited to the grandiose taste of the owner. This was in the days before town planning, and doubtless such a sacrilege would not be allowed today. But I am afraid town planning has come too late to save this particular town. I could howl with sorrow and fury when I am shown old photographs showing clusters of picturesque cottages which have been swept away in the name of “progress” as not fit to live in, and replaced by horrible red-brick bungalows, when they could have been preserved and converted to modern requirements of hygiene as has been done with ours. The dear little old shops with their bow-fronted windows and low eaves have gone, and the three main shopping thoroughfares of Swanage could now be dumped intact into Kilburn High Road or any London suburb and no one would notice the difference. I loathe this aspect of the place to such an extent that I am often tempted to move to some other district where some sort of civic conscience has been at work and where the character and beauty of the ancient construction has not been wantonly destroyed. But I must return, after this splenetic outburst, to the building housing the exhibition—now a convent, I add for the benefit of those who wonder how anyone could bear to live in it. (The good sisters, no doubt, are able to do so because their vocation gives them a wider tolerance of the folly and wickedness of men; and, of course, they have a great deal of room in it for the school which they run so efficiently.)

As one of the organizing committee I had an unrivalled opportunity to handle and examine many treasures about which I knew little or nothing. I was able to observe the beautiful workmanship of German enamellers, Chinese miniature painters—there was one Chinese fan in which the detail had to be picked out with a magnifying glass for you could scarcely see it with the naked eye, even if you had strong sight—and many different

kinds of continental porcelain from the obscurer factories. I could squint at silver marks and try my hand at identifying and cataloguing—all valuable training for the amateur antiquarian. And what pleased me most, I was able to chat with streams of visitors—many of whom were holiday-makers merely seeking a refuge from the rain—and try to instill in them some appreciation of the beauty of things their ancestors had made. Not that this was always necessary. Far from it. Many of our patrons proved extremely knowledgeable and were able to teach *us* a thing or two.

Talking (I will not say lecturing, because I prefer to speak informally without notes) to Women's Institutes has taught me to beware of "talking down" to any audience whatever. Surveying from a platform, as I have often done, a sea of faces obviously belonging to the wives of farmers and small tradesmen, old-age pensioners and village worthies of various social levels, you might think that in a talk on Old China you could get away with a good deal of guff. But you would soon be in the soup if you did. Tucked away in the back row and watching you with an eye like a hawk may be some little old lady who owns some of the most marvellous Meissen you ever saw in your life—and who knows to the last halfpenny what it is worth. Some of these dear old things like to test you out during the opportunity which is given them after the talk to ask the speaker's advice on pieces which they own. As an instance of this I was asked quite recently if I could identify a beautiful plate one of them had brought to show me. Now I would not claim to be the world's best expert on Oriental porcelain and I was not on very sure ground when I offered the opinion that it was a piece of Chinese *famille verte*. I asked if she had any more like it. Yes, she said, she had three more at home. She then asked me if I could give her an idea of their value. Providence came to my aid and I said that if all the plates were perfect they might be worth as much as a couple of hundred pounds. She gave an artful little smile and told me that my identification had been correct and that she had in fact been offered £120 by a dealer.

I am not always so lucky as this and have occasionally guessed wrong. But I enjoy these after-the-lecture sessions and the chance of discovering that there are many treasures in humble homes which are still cherished and are not for sale. I like to find that my words have fallen on far from stony ground—on the contrary, on highly appreciative ears.

It is a curious aspect of the times—when all about us is so much destruction and ugliness—that books and magazine features about antiques are increasing in popularity. My feature in *Good House-keeping*, called “Antique Adventures,” was originally scheduled to run for six months but was continued for fourteen months, which speaks for itself. This book is mainly a result of the large and enthusiastic readership those articles enjoyed.

If you are interested in furthering a love of old things, and in teaching people who own them to respect and care for them, you should try to organize an exhibition such as the one I have described. It need not be on such a large scale to be effective. Last year in this village the Women’s Institute held one as a means of raising funds. It was called “Personal Treasures,” and there was scarcely a household which could not produce some item of interest to swell the collection, though not always valuable. It was surprising what came to light. In one case we thought for a short time that we had made an astounding discovery and traced the private seal of Mary, Queen of Scots, which is said to have been taken—and subsequently lost—by the Bothwell family. An elderly lady brought along a shabby thimble case and asked my wife, one of the organizers, if she would mind keeping an eye on the contents. It was such a tiny thing, she said, and could easily get mislaid. Inside the case was a small seal, cylindrical in shape, about three-quarters of an inch long and apparently of rock crystal. On one end were incised Mary Stuart’s initials over the royal arms of Scotland. My wife came home in great excitement after helping to arrange the goods loaned for the exhibition. The old lady had told her how she came by the seal. It had been given to her when she was a little girl, that is about sixty years ago, by a family friend who had bought it at a sale on a lonely farm on the border, near Carlisle.

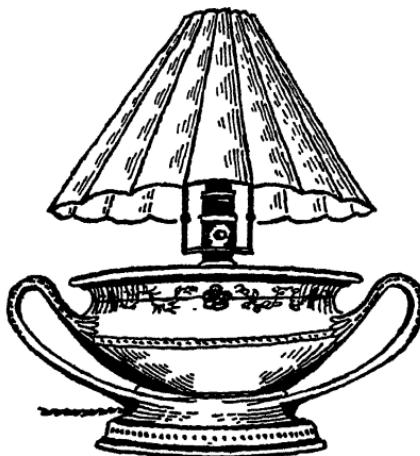
Could it be genuine, we wondered? Needless to say, when the exhibition opened I made a bee-line for Exhibit 24, taking my magnifying lens with me. Unfortunately I found that visitors were not allowed to handle the treasures, so had to be content with a casual view. It looked genuine enough to my unpracticed eye—I am not an authority on glyptics. The heraldic device was minutely fine and, if engraved and not moulded, was beautiful work. I had hoped for an opportunity to examine the seal more closely later; but again I was defeated. After the exhibition closed, the old lady—stimulated by my wife’s interest—sent her

treasure to the Edinburgh Museum for authentication. Alas for all our hopes. The seal was merely a copy, one of a number issued as souvenirs early in the reign of Victoria. The original is safely housed in the British Museum.

But we console ourselves with the reflection that it *might* have been genuine, in other circumstances. Fate decreed that the missing seal, if it *was* appropriated by Bothwell, should be recovered and preserved. But it *might* not have happened that way at all. It *might* have lain hidden or unrecognized, passed on from hand to hand, till it came to light four hundred years later in the Dorset village of Langton Matravers.

Stranger things have happened.





#### CHAPTER ELEVEN

### NEW USES FOR ANTIQUES

IN a previous chapter I mentioned that we had been given a section of Elizabethan carved oak panelling with which to make a corner cupboard for our hall. For some time after the gift arrived we were unable to put the job into commission. Neither we nor the carpenter who was going to do it for us could find any suitable pieces of old oak for the frame, or "skeleton."

At last after much searching our carpenter, Alan Marsh, was able to buy cheaply a large old table in a condition beyond repair, but which contained enough timber still sound and usable.

His task was rendered extra difficult because the panel itself had to be straightened out. We thought at first it was warped; but then came to the conclusion that it had purposely been made with a gentle curve so that it would fit on the slightly curved surface of some ancient wall. Clever as he is, Alan was very nearly flummoxed by this problem, because straightening the panel would open up gaps in the carving and ruin the complicated pattern. Finally, by slow steaming and careful filling, he overcame the obstacle and then set to work on the frame.

We had decided that this should be absolutely plain, so as to display to the full the glorious carving of the door. But even this was not easy to do, for our own walls are ancient and irregular and presented many problems in adjustment. Nothing was spared to make a perfect job. The timber was specially treated so that it

matched in color, old iron hinges and a suitable door handle had to be found. I hope it will be possible to include a photograph of this latest and most impressive addition to our home; but in case it is not, you must imagine it—when looking at the picture of the hall—filling the corner where the spinning-wheel shows.

We were lucky to have a local craftsman capable of undertaking such a task. It could not have been better done even by the man who made the original panel. Already the cupboard looks as if it had been in place for centuries. I do not know who has had more pleasure from it—ourselves, the possessors of a splendid piece of furniture, or Alan Marsh, whose workmanship is a tribute to the best traditions of English cabinet-making. I shall never forget how his eyes lit up when he first saw the panel; you could almost feel his hands itching to get to work on it.

Alan's father, over eighty, but still active as a builder and undertaker in the village, figured in my wife's book *Home Is Where You Make It*, under a fictitious name. It was he who was very largely responsible for our purchase of this property. It was in an appalling state of dereliction. We could not afford to employ an architect or surveyor and we badly needed the advice of someone we could trust as to whether the roof and main structure were sound. So we took our problem to Alan's father, and on his word alone we signed the contract of sale. He had been over the poor battered old ruin with painstaking thoroughness—charging us not a penny for his services—and finally pronounced, "The shell's right enough. If you got a sound shell, the innards don't signify." But my wife has told this story, along with the full account of our conversion of the cottages into the charming home we have today, and in one sense my book represents a sequel to hers.

A little ingenuity will often transform an unwanted or broken antique, or one which has outlived its original purpose, into an article combining beauty with utility. Interior decorators are constantly blending the old with the new and much of their work consists of hunting for fine old things, restoring and adapting them. But not everyone can afford the services of these experts. Many of us have to achieve the effects we want by our own efforts and enterprise.

One field in which even the least skilful of us can produce some result is that of table and standard lamps.

In the picture of our living-room you will notice a particularly delightful specimen made out of a Staffordshire group and surmounted by a mushroom-shaped shade which throws a soft light right on to the subject, showing up all its quaint coloring and details of modelling. Any piece of pottery or porcelain which is large enough to bear the weight of the shade and fittings will adapt equally well. In the case of damaged pieces which have no value to collectors it does not matter if you have them bored to take the cable, grind off the rim of a vase to take the fitting—do what you will. But only a lunatic would do this with a perfect piece, or even with a slightly imperfect piece which is a rarity. (Sad to relate, there are a good many lunatics about.) What you should do is to have a whitewood base made, on to which the electric fitting is attached. Thus you will have a kind of low platform on to which your Chelsea figure or your Sèvres vase can stand, and moreover be interchangeable with other pieces so as to give variety to the scene.

Tanner is very ingenious in this matter of "lamping"—to use the atrocious phrase current among antique dealers. "I'll lamp it," you can hear them say sometimes when examining a chipped or unsaleable vase in a consignment of goods.

He came back one day from Wareham with an object he had bought for sixpence at Mrs. Best's junk shop, and which seemed to me utterly useless. It had once been a very fine Bohemian ruby glass goblet, but the whole of the base had been snapped off and lost. The belly of the goblet tapered off to a few inches of jagged stem. What Tanner did was to *invert* it, fitting the lamp holder on to the filed-off stem, and after he had supplied it with an elegant little Empire shade of amber satin he had about as pretty a little table lamp as you could wish to see, and he sold it for four guineas.

I was forced to accord him my respectful admiration for this feat. He had at one time, like all his London associates in the trade, a passion for old oil lamps, especially brass or ormolu ones with decorative glass bowls and those made by the famous porcelain factories. We have one made by the Berlin factory, in grey with white classical figures in relief, an unusual and very handsome example. It was my wife who acquired it, and I am afraid the transaction was somewhat squalid from start to finish.

In the beginning my wife did not even know the lamp existed. What she thought she was buying was a mattress belonging to the late Giles Dugdale, an authority on the life and work of William Barnes, the Dorset poet. Giles, who died recently, was then living in a studio at Corfe Castle, but about to move to somewhere else where he would have very little room for his multifarious belongings. We, who were in the throes of moving into *our* new home, met him in Swanage one morning and he asked if we could do with a mattress. It was a single one, he said, interior sprung and practically new. He did not want to send it to a salesroom where it might lie about for weeks getting grubbier and grubbier, and he had no time to advertise it. If it was any use to us we could have it for a couple of pounds. Well, we did need a mattress for our spare room, as it happened, so the deal was clinched on the spot and Nina arranged to drive over and collect it in a week's time. Knowing of old that Giles was a great ditherer and liable to change his mind several times a day, Nina prudently sent him a cheque at once. When she went to the studio on the appointed day she found that Giles had forgotten about it and gone out. She went again—and the same thing happened. The third time Giles was in, but he had changed his mind and wanted to keep the mattress. Nina asked for the return of her cheque, but in the general clutter of the studio this could not be found. Hours were spent in rummaging under mountains of papers, typescripts and old clothes. Nina was by now very much annoyed. It is a good five miles from where we live to Corfe and she had done the journey three times when she was extremely busy with our move and her own professional work. She then told him he had better keep the cheque but that she would not leave without taking something for her trouble. Giles was genuinely apologetic and said, "Would you care to take that lamp and this small Persian rug? The lamp isn't worth more than a few shillings but the rug will be all right if it is cleaned." Nina agreed. Without so much as looking at the substitutes she picked them up and swept out of the studio. The rug, I fear, turned out to be so faded that it was almost worthless. But the lamp was a beauty. Tanner has coveted it ever since he first saw it. Every time he comes to stay he makes a fresh bid for it. The offer has now reached a fiver, but we won't sell. Nor will we have the lamp converted to electricity. We have removed the cut glass bowl that held

the oil, and also the wick fitting, but otherwise left it as it is, purely for ornament.

Giles was by no means alone in despising his old oil lamp—and this in spite of the fact that they can so easily be converted to modern use and are much sought after by dealers. You may find it difficult to credit the following story, but I assure you it is no invention and it happened only a few months ago.

Tanner was down for a few days, between shows; and as usual he was seizing the opportunity to find some stock for his shop. He had had a ticking off from his partner for being lax in this respect, so he was very anxious to make good. Consulting the local paper he had found that there were, on a certain day, three auction sales taking place in various parts of the county. As it was a fine frosty day he suggested we should have a day's outing, take plenty of sandwiches and hot drinks and drive from sale to sale seeing what we could pick up. This sounded quite attractive, but an argument arose as to choice of transport. We ourselves now have a Daimler (in case anyone thinks we have ideas above our station I should explain that it is a very old one and didn't cost nearly as much as a small car of post-war vintage). It is sumptuously comfortable and ideal for long trips when comfort and smooth running are so important.

Tanner, at this time, did not have the impressive station wagon he now owns. He had a horrible little van consisting of an Austin chassis on to which a kind of small cattle truck had been fixed. Bits of it flew off from time to time, the self-starter wouldn't work, the rear doors had to be roped to keep them shut and, worst of all, the engine belched oil at every pore. After half an hour or so the passenger in the front seat—directly over the gap in the rotting floorboards—was as black as a sweep and half asphyxiated. To our dismay, Tanner insisted on our travelling in this death-trap because, he said, our car had nothing but a rear luggage grid and if he bought any goods he naturally wanted to bring them back himself and not have to pay heavy charges to the carrier. So off we started. Nina and I elected to sit in the back, on the floor of the van, so as to try and escape the fumes. Roped in like sheep en route to the abattoir we rattled and hopped and bounced across the length and breadth of Dorset—from here to Shaftesbury, from Shaftesbury to Sturminster Newton, from Sturminster Newton to Blandford—and at none of these ports of call did Tanner or I succeed in

buying a single thing. Either there was nothing we wanted, or else the goods were fetching too much money.

The only thing we brought home with us—and this is where the story properly begins—was a pair of the prettiest brass lamps I had seen for a long time, with glass bowls which were probably made at Bristol as they had the typical milky reds and blues. It was at the Sturminster Newton sale, only a small house containing one or two nice things and the rest very ordinary. We had made a hurried inspection, decided not to stay and were on our way out when Tanner caught sight of a heap of broken glass kicked into a corner of the kitchen. It was the remains of one of these lamp globes and Tanner made some comment which was overheard by the porter. “If it’s them old oil lamps you want, sir, there’s a pair I threw out with the rubbish in the outhouse. You’re welcome to them—the clerk wouldn’t put ‘em in the catalogue.”

He led the way into the outhouse and there they were—very dirty but perfect in every way. Half a crown changed hands and Tanner bore them away in triumph. So far as he was concerned they were worth the journey; but I can’t say the same for us!

Our standard lamps in the living-room are converted wrought-iron lamp holders which originally must have come out of a church. It has been the simplest job, even for an amateur electrician like me, to run the flex through the hollow center tube and fix on a fitting. The advantage these standards have is that the light can be raised or lowered to suit the height of your chair. They are equally attractive either left black or given a coat of paint to match the decoration of your room. One of ours is black and one white. We did have a third, unconverted and used as a plant stand, but we sold it to make way for something else. None of them cost more than a pound. The third one, as a matter of fact, was obtained from the same source as Tanner’s table lamps—namely, the rubbish heap at the back of an auction room. The moral of this is therefore: always look in the dustbin. You never know what you may find. It may be a valuable old book someone has thrown out with the newspapers. Some treasures have, in fact, come to light in this way, and you don’t necessarily have to be a dustman to find them.

Soon after Nina and I were married we were loaned a cottage

in Devon for a summer holiday. Our only near neighbor was a solitary old woman who was not only very bad tempered but half crazy into the bargain. During the month of our stay she was carted off to hospital and there died. Whereupon the landlord, who had been trying for years to evict her, swooped down on the cottage and cleaned it out from top to bottom. It was in a filthy state, the old woman's few miserable bits of furniture having mouldered away with damp and neglect. A bonfire was lit in the front garden, but some of the soft goods such as bedlinen, curtains and clothing, were so damp that they would not burn. We watched the landlord and his wife bringing out armful after armful to the dustbins by the garden gate. It was not till they had finished, locked up and gone away that I went past the cottage on an evening stroll. The bins had been put outside in the lane, and as I walked past I noticed something hanging out of one of them that called for closer inspection. Little as I knew of materials I could see that this had once been superlatively good. It was a length of burgundy red velvet with a raised effect—I am told it is called broché velvet—and seemed part of a garment like an opera cloak. Stained and moth-eaten though it was I could not resist pulling it out, and once having started, began to delve further. Using the sharp point of my walking-stick I next fished out the remains of a magnificent ball gown of the Edwardian era ; after that another dress worked with delicate bead embroidery—and then a sort of negligée made of perished but beautiful lace—a whole wardrobe which must once have cost a small fortune. Intermingled with the clothes were the remains of fan boxes, glove boxes, sachets, hair combs and curling irons—all the paraphernalia of a rich woman's toilet in a bygone day. Almost at the bottom of the bin I came on the jewel case of shagreen leather, ruined and splitting at the seams. It disintegrated as I lifted it, and out fell—no, not a diamond necklace but something that looked remarkably like it. It was a collarette such as used to be worn by Edwardian ladies round their throats, a triple row of the finest diamond-cut paste (it may even be white topaz), each stone separately mounted and stitched on to a band of oyster-colored satin. It lay on the path, glittering and flashing in the last light of the sun.

At first, of course, I thought they *were* diamonds and that I was made for life. But their very size soon undeceived me. Anyway it was a most beautiful thing and I hurried home with it to my

wife. If I had had a tail to wag I should have felt like a doggy chum laying an extra fine bone at his mistress's feet.

I refused at first, for reasons of delicacy, to say where I had got it ; but the truth was finally wrenched out of me. We talked for a long time of the mystery of how those relics of a once-brilliant past came to be in a cottage dustbin. There was a story there, and being writers we put our noses to the trail but we could find out nothing about the history or background of the old woman, and all that we have is the collarette she involuntarily bequeathed to us.

It has been useful on more than one occasion. My wife has very long hair which she wears in a chignon at the back of her head. At grand functions she clasps the collarette around the chignon in a manner which I understand is the last word in present fashions. One more instance of an old thing coming into its own again in a different guise. I tell that story without a blush of shame, and if anyone thinks I have missed my vocation they are welcome to say so.

While I would not say I customarily go about ragpicking or poking in refuse heaps I do know that it is quite extraordinary what some people—often those who can ill afford the gesture—will stupidly throw away. It happened only a little while ago that a friend of ours was walking down the village street on her way to post a letter and she saw, shoved out in the road by one of the cottagers for the municipal garbage cart to collect, a beautiful old Spode basin in the well-known " Indian pattern " with its elegant little minarets and temples. She knew that I collect old English blue-and-white and that the basin was probably a piece that I would like. But the situation was tricky. On the fact of it there was nothing to stop her walking away with an object that had clearly been discarded ; but to have been *seen* doing so would be rather below the dignity of a resident of some social standing.

While she was debating what to do, the cottager opened her door again, this time to put the cat out. She was an old woman of nearly ninety and very deaf. Our friend approached her and then ensued a conversation, conducted at the top of both voices, in which the word *bowl* was mixed up with *stole*, *soul* and *coal* ; *Spode* became *toad*, and it was all highly confusing and attracted a great deal of attention, heads popping out of windows all round. Anyway, the upshot was satisfactory to all parties. The

old woman didn't care who took the bowl away as she no longer used it ; since the water had been laid on she washed up in a proper sink. It was very old, she said, it had belonged to her mother before her and to *her* mother before that. I was most grateful to our friend and delighted with my basin—especially since by some miracle it was quite perfect. It now stands on the console table in the hall, a companion piece to the great meat dish on the window-sill. Incidentally, as a sidelight on the selfish zeal of the collector, I have been trying to persuade our friend to go back and ask the old woman if she has got a ewer to match ! But she has dug her toes in and firmly refuses.

Old inkwells look equally good on modern desks, even the quite elaborate specimens in ormolu. I have a charming one with two square-cut glass inkpots whose gilt enamelled lids are painted with flying cupids. I spotted this at a Boy Scout jumble sale—or rather, Tanner and I spotted it simultaneously and we quarrelled over it all the way home. I won because I could claim that I had actually got my hand on it first.

Rural jumble sales are among the lesser joys of Tanner's life. He never misses one if he can help it.

Beautiful and expensive-looking mirrors can be made out of old gilt wood and plaster picture frames, which can often be picked up cheaply on account of the hideous picture they enclose. For that matter almost any nice old frame—including the quaint Victorian ones covered in velvet—can be turned into a mirror providing there is enough depth to take the glass without making an awkward bulge at the back.

Some of the gilded plaster frames are extremely massive and ornate. But uses can be found even for these. Their massive-ness is an asset if they are converted into valances, headboards, fireplace screens and frames for hanging cupboards.

There is a considerable trade in large pieces of old furniture—enormous wardrobes and bookcases etc.—which cabinet-makers break up for the beautiful wood in them. Out of this they make small tables, cupboards and a great variety of items which find their way into antique shops and are sold as old pieces—which in a sense they are, for their materials are old and it is often hard to tell them from the genuine article. The

makers are skilful, and they supplement their skill by counterfeiting wormholes as well! It is very difficult, when you are at a sale and you see some huge wardrobe going for a song, a magnificent piece of Victorian cabinet-making with the lovely grain matched in the mahogany panels and the inner trays sliding in and out like silk, not to visualize what you could do with it if you bought it and cut it down. But to undertake such a task is beyond me and I would never attempt it. The only time I experimented with this kind of thing was on the simple but pleasant dinner wagon you can see standing beside the settee on the left side of our living-room. In that position it was fine, and most useful for tucking away library books, magazines and newspapers, chocolate boxes, gramophone records and the usual litter of a much-lived-in room. But the day came when we got tired of the arrangement and switched everything around—and then found the dinner wagon, being over four feet long, wouldn't fit into the new arrangement anywhere. Wherever we put it, it looked too big. So then I had a brainwave. I sawed it in half, thus making two small pieces, one of which now stands in each of the recesses under the windows at the end of the room. In its rebirth as a pair of whatnots it is just as useful as it was formerly; and as it only cost eight shillings I have suffered no pangs about this bit of surgery.

Spinets, harpsichords, clavichords and the early pianos can be turned into useful adjuncts to the modern home. I have seen them adapted for use as sideboards, dressing-tables, desks and linen chests. Few people seem to want these old instruments to play on, except perhaps the spinets which have antiquarian as well as practical value—and most of them are in too poor condition to be restored anyway. But the workmanship and the wood in them, very often rosewood, is beautiful; and if they cannot be used for the purpose for which they were made, then I suppose it is better to "convert" sooner than destroy them.

Of these, at least, I have never seen one which has been disfigured by layers of paint, as is so often the case with fine old oak and mahogany chests of drawers. We have in our spare bedroom an extremely pretty Georgian chest which has been marred in this way. One of these days I intend to strip that chest down to the wood itself. I know it will entail great labor, as the white paint is several coats deep, and the beading and

crevices will try my patience to the limit. But the job will be worth it when I have smoothed the surface of the mahogany with fine sandpaper and treated it with linseed oil and finally wax polish.

Our refectory table, the making of which out of driftwood was described in my wife's book, has never had anything on it but a polish made by ourselves of pure beeswax and turpentine. After six years of loving application the timber is forming a rich glossy patina which enhances the graining of the oak and walnut immeasurably.

Nearly all the fine things made in the past have some sort of use today. If you wish, you may house your radio set in a Sheraton wash-stand and keep your tradesmen's bills in a Georgian tea caddy. You may use a Jacobean cradle for a log basket. And an old brass-banded wine barrel for an umbrella stand. You may stand your toothbrushes, as we do, in a lidless but exquisite Rockingham teapot. You may fix an old wrought-iron bracket, which once hung over an inn door, over your own front door or your garden gate, holding a signboard showing the name of your house instead of a Black Bear or King's Head. You may display on your dinner table a sensational flower arrangement in an old soup tureen. You may turn the glass shade of a lamp upside down, suspend it from the ceiling and grow trailing ivy in it. You may find a Georgian knife box a useful accessory to your desk as a small filing cabinet for correspondence. And, of course, if you are lucky enough to possess them, you can use a great many old things for their original purposes. *Why*, for instance, not stick a few hot coals in that copper warming pan and warm your bed with it as your ancestors did? It will prove just as effective as an electric blanket, I can assure you, cost nothing for current and absolve you from all fears of electrocuting yourself.

Finally we come to the garden. Old houses mostly have exterior accoutrements in the way of urns, statuary, lead figures and fountains. But I see no reason why a new house should not have a garden embellished by beautiful old things rather than by plaster gnomes, toadstools and squirrels peeping roguishly through the lobelia. If you have a toadstool complex, try to find an old staddle stone, like the one Wilkins is sitting on in

Plate 6. It will have a good deal more dignity than a painted-plaster imitation. Staddle stones are fairly easy to find if you live anywhere near quarrying country. They used to be used for the foundations of barns and corn ricks, to baffle the rats. You can still see them around here, used for their original purpose as well as garden ornaments; but modern hygienic farm buildings have made them largely redundant.

(Wilkins looks black and white in the photograph. Actually the darker parts of him are mole grey. This coloring is less rare round here than elsewhere. He is what we call a "Purbeck blue.")

One does not necessarily envisage Palladian columns or gigantic leaden urns and balustrades. But there are a great many charming things deriving from old estates, now broken up, which will blend quite happily with modern ideas in landscaping in gardens and back yards in cities and suburbs. I have seen back yards transformed with a little ingenuity into delightful little "patios," the dirty brick walls whitewashed and covered with trellis up which climb roses and clematis, the center paved with brick or stone and furnished with stone vases, wrought-iron seats and tables—sometimes large porcelain *jardinières* which add their bright colors to those of the flowers.

Some of the old lead-wire hanging baskets and plant stands can be used in a setting of this kind.

Discreetly placed, as the focal point in a hedged walk, a marble statue can look very pleasing even in a modern garden. So can a sundial or a stone bird bath—or, if your birds fancy something more imposing, an old carved font or wall fountain such as one sometimes sees in junk yards.

One of our own garden ornaments is an antique with a vengeance—being about a million years old. It is an ammonite, the fossilized skeleton of a prehistoric marine worm and it is an unusually large one, about eighteen inches across. Stood up on end it forms an attractive backing for our bird bath, a roughly hewn stone trough. These troughs are worth searching for if you happen to live in a part of the country where quarrying is one of the local industries. They are of all shapes and sizes, for in the old days they served many different purposes. Before earthenware began to be manufactured in quantity the cottages had stone sinks, later thrown out when plumbing was installed. As they have the original plug holes they make most

useful additions to a small garden, for they can be filled with earth but will have drainage facilities. The smaller rough-hewn ones make the best bird baths, in my opinion. Those of more regular shape can be built into a drystone wall so as to form a niche for a little lead figure. We have done this with one of our walls and it looks charming—the only thing lacking being the lead figure, which so far we haven't been able to find! Sheep and cattle troughs were all made of stone at one time, in these parts. One of the biggest I have ever seen is half buried in a ruined cowshed not far from here. It is about eight feet long by three feet wide, hollowed out of a single slab of Purbeck freestone, and I dare say it weighs anything up to a ton. My wife has her eye on this, as a projected lily pond. How she proposes to get it here I have no idea. But, knowing her, I dare say she will accomplish it somehow—even if, to paraphrase *The Walrus and the Carpenter*, it takes "seven men with seven cranes."

There is a rare old wheelwright's trough in a garden close by. It came out of what was once the village smithy. The cavity is narrow and boat-shaped, to take the red-hot iron wagon wheels which were cooled in it.

Nothing is more beautiful than stone which has been exposed to the weathering of centuries. It has a thousand tints and, like a woman embellishing her natural complexion, wears a make-up of delicate lichens and mosses. If I were an artist trying to paint it I would feel humbled by the impossibility of the task. No marble, in my view, can compare with it. But it was not for this reason that I rejected a large statue offered to us by some friends who had found it in the shrubbery of a house they had just bought. We were quite excited—until we saw it. It was a life-sized nude reclining female. It was the *attitude* that settled it. She looked as if she had fought ten rounds with Rocky Marciano and gone down for the count. She was not so much reclining as sprawling; and having lain there among dank undergrowth for a number of years her face and limbs had acquired a livid greenish tinge like bruises which bore out the impression that the poor lady had taken a hammering. She is still there, so far as I know, getting greener and greener.

When we were making our garden, out of the acre of dense wilderness acquired with our cottages, we badly wanted some

decorative stone or lead vases to place at strategic points on our terrace. Lead ones proved beyond our reach financially and the iron substitutes we were sometimes offered were not only costly but ugly as well. Whenever we saw a sale advertised which included "outside effects" we chased off to it in hopes of finding just the right thing at the right price. Eventually the chance came, but I flatter myself that few people besides ourselves would have known how to take advantage of it. In fact, we were the only bidders for a collection of three pairs, plus their pedestals, of attractively shaped vases made of terra cotta, and we got the lot for fifteen shillings. You may be wondering why, when we had set our hearts on the mellowness of old stone, we would even have considered these at all. They were almost new and had the typically crude raw-red look of their material. Ah, but it was for their shapes that we bought them. On the way home we collected a bucketful of stone dust from a local quarry and a tin of cement wash from the ironmonger. We mixed this compound in the proportion of two parts of the latter to one of the former, and then we gave our vases several coats of it—and at once they looked as if they were made of stone or plaster. At first they were rather glaringly white, but after a while time and the weather have mellowed them to the faintly green tint that gives a semblance of antiquity.

One last tip, while we are in the garden. If you want to add a really unusual touch to your domain, instead of buying wrought-iron gates—which are fearfully expensive if hand-wrought, and if cheap, probably not hand-wrought at all—try this. Look round your local farmyards for a pair of discarded wheels off an old hay cart, have them mounted on a strong frame and fit them as entrance gates. You will be several jumps ahead of the Joneses, I can promise you.





## CHAPTER TWELVE

### ENVOI

**A**NYONE who has read as far as this may be saying to himself, "This chap has burbled on for a hundred and sixty pages and barely touched on so-and-so—the one thing I really wanted to know about." Or else: "What this chap has to say is all very well, but he hasn't given me much practical help in forming a collection."

In answer to the first I can only say that no one book can cover the vast field of antiques, even in a superficial way. I know that I have merely flitted over it, rather like a hefty butterfly, but that is all I set out to do.

To the second grouser I would say this: if I have made you feel that you would *like* to begin forming a collection in a small way, of some of the fascinating things I have discussed in this book, then I have completely succeeded in my aim.

To have the interest, the wish and the intention is what matters in the first instance. All the technical information you need can be obtained from standard works and any recognized experts you are able to consult.

I wanted to impart some of my own interest in old things and, for the encouragement of others, describe how I came by those which I have. I would not say that I have been any luckier than most. The same opportunities, the same sources of supply, are equally open to you.

Above all, I wanted to try and share with others the fun I

have had in my collecting, and the enjoyment that lies in the sheer possession of fine things—not necessarily of fabulous value but made by craftsmen of fine materials—for their own sake. I began knowing nothing—and of course the cynic might comment that I now know very little more. But that would not be true. Every single thing I have bought has taught me something. I don't any longer fall into the pitfalls that beset the unwary, nor would I now make the silly mistakes I often made when starting. And, quite apart from other considerations, I could sell at a profit every piece I own, which is no mean testimony to my powers of judgment.

The publication of my wife's book about the conversion of our cottages led to a stream of visitors anxious to see for themselves the subject and the people of the story. Many of these people took as keen an interest in the contents as in the building itself, examining our antique pieces, asking questions about them, and sometimes giving useful items of information in return. I had many a talk with the more intelligent of them and I think that in some cases I kindled a spark in the right quarter. But I very often found out, though they envied ours, they felt such things to be well beyond their own reach. They had seen old furniture marked at very high prices in antique shops and concluded that it was, obviously, only for the rich. In such cases I had a special technique. I would go round the room in which we happened to be standing and tell them, item by item, exactly what these things that they admired so much had cost us to buy. Then I would ask them to compare the total with that of the modern furnishings of an equivalent room in their own home. Mostly they had to admit that the advantage was all on the side of the old as against the new.

I believe I cannot do better than include a similar demonstration in this closing chapter of my book. I will do it in the hall, of which we have an excellent photograph in Plate 2. Everything in sight, with the exception of the doormat, the gun and the barometer, is old and a fine example of its type and period.

The oak dower chest, dated 1677, cost seven pounds in a local auction. Its lid was broken, three of the small pediments were missing, and the old iron spike hinges had to be replaced by more practical ones. These repairs were done for us by

Alan Marsh for an additional thirty shillings—making £8 10s. in all. Not much, you will agree, for an article combining utility with so much antiquity and beauty.

Standing on the chest are a Mason's ironstone jug and a pair of Chamberlain's Worcester armorial plates in turquoise and gold. The jug formed part of a mixed lot of china, including part of an Ironstone dinner service, which fetched thirty-eight shillings. The plates were among another mixed lot of china for which I paid one pound. The spinning-wheel, seventeenth century, is unusual in that it is complete with its distaff and in perfect working order. I am sorry you cannot see the lower part, or body, of it, for this is most charming and has a heart carved on it, perhaps by the sweetheart of some long dead maiden whose foot kept the wheel whirring through long winter evenings. When we bought it, this item was in fifteen pieces and our bid was the only one made. By the time we had had it carefully reassembled and repaired where necessary it had cost us something under four pounds. Since this photograph was taken our splendid cupboard has been built into that corner. For sheer lack of any other suitable place for it (and also to defray part of the cost of the cupboard) we have sold the spinning-wheel. But it has not gone far away—only to some friends of ours whose home is Godlington Manor, the most beautiful old manor house in this part of Dorset; so it will have a setting worthy of it.

The elegant little console table with its curved marble top was found, disfigured with livid green paint, in a junk shop and bought for five shillings. The loving-cup standing on it is the one I unearthed among the rubbish in the old cottage at Worth Matravers. For five shillings this, too, changed hands.

The hunting prints (you can only see three of them, the rest are hidden by the staircase) are the Alkens I have talked about in my chapter on pictures and prints, the set my wife bought in the auction sale at Poole. They cost her three guineas.

The very pretty wrought-iron lamp bracket I found in Church Street market, for seven and sixpence. Finally, hanging from a hook in the ceiling and serving the purpose of a gong when we wish to summon lie-abed guests to breakfast, is an ancient iron cow bell which cost me nothing but a drop or two of honest sweat—I dug it up out of my vegetable patch last year along with the early potatoes.

If you add up these items you will find that the whole lot comes to less than twenty pounds. But if you tried to buy them in a high-class antique shop, instead of picking them up here, there and everywhere as we have done, I dare say the chest alone would cost more than that.

I must stress the point that we have taken our time in equipping the cottage, never letting ourselves be rushed into making rash purchases but biding our time until the right piece turned up. Sometimes we have had to make do with a cheap substitute—as in the case of the Victorian chest of drawers you can see in the picture of our bedroom, Plate 5. We are still waiting for another small Georgian chest to match the one opposite. In the meantime the makeshift does quite well, and since it only cost twenty-two shillings we shall certainly not lose money on it.

From buying to selling. Assuming that I have inspired you with the wish to start collecting something or other, you may feel that you cannot afford it unless you dispose of superfluous items you already have. This is no bad way to begin, as a matter of fact, for you will raise a bit of money which can be devoted to the purpose without any pangs of conscience, and you will make room for your new acquisitions. Have a good look round and see what you can get rid of without breaking up your marriage in the process. This goes for items which you have kept since the year one for their sentimental value alone. Personally I am no respecter of this stupid obligation. I cannot see why I should be forced to give house room to some unlovely and useless object simply because it was a wedding present from my Aunt Matilda—or because it has “been in the family” for generations. If this were carried to its logical extreme it would mean that most of us would be entirely buried under mountainous agglomerations of possessions. Every now and then I go over my house and ruthlessly weed out every single thing I don’t want, can’t use, or have taken a sudden dislike to. By doing so I can always find a place for some piece I have bought to add to my collection.

Let us assume you have a cabinet full of odd pieces of china and glass, few of which will fit into your plan. You don’t know much about them, but you think there may be some that are valuable.

If you are unfamiliar with auctions you may be feeling

slightly deterred by certain aspects I have touched on from sending your goods to a public sale—though there is no reason why this should be so providing you first ascertain their value and fix suitable bottom prices. Whatever you are selling, or where or how—by auction, through advertisement or through direct approach to an antique dealer—find out all you can about the goods *first*. If you don't, and if you afterwards learn that you have let a valuable article go for nearly nothing, you have only yourself to blame. It is no use blaming the dealer. According to his lights he has dealt fairly. He is under no compulsion to tell you what you are selling if you don't know this yourself.

I have often been in the back room of a local dealer's shop and overheard the sort of transaction taking place "out front" when some timid little old lady edges in with an object which she extracts from her shopping basket. "I wondered—as I have no use for it—whether you might care to buy this? I know nothing about it except that it is very old and has been in my family for generations."

The dealer takes the thing and examines it. If it is worthless he tells her so. If it is good he asks how much she wants for it. "Well, you see—I really have no idea—" And so on, until in the end a bargain is struck, very much to the dealer's advantage.

I know this dealer pretty well and we have long talks about the ethics of a case like this. He told me, "I once tried to play fair with one of these old girls. She brought in a pair of rare Chelsea figures and when I asked her what she wanted for them she said five pounds. I told her this was absurd and that I would give her fifty. Whereupon she gave me a sharp look and said if they were worth that to *me* they were probably worth *more* to someone in a bigger way of business, and she wouldn't let me have them at all! So now, if anyone offers me for five pounds something that's worth five hundred, five pounds is what I'll pay, and that's that."

However, there's another side to every story. I was once in that same back room when a woman brought in a small salver of old Sheffield plate. As usual, she didn't know what it was or what it was worth. My dealer friend paid her a pound for it. When she had left and I came out of hiding I picked up the salver and saw that it was so old and worn that in many places the copper was entirely exposed. In this condition it was

worth no more than he had paid for it, if as much, and his chance of "shifting" it was small. In fact I saw him stick it away in a cupboard along with some other doubtful purchases.

"Well," he said when I tackled him about it, "she looked as if she could do with the quid, poor old soul."

You may say that he was salving his conscience by an occasional generous gesture—but at least he has a conscience to salve, which is more than can be said of many of his cronies in the trade.

Having read thus far and profited by my advice it may happen that you have realized quite a nice little sum by disposing of odd pieces you didn't really want. The question now arises of what to do with it? The first thing to buy, obviously, is a book (or several books) on the particular branch of antiques that attracts you as a collector. Some of the formerly rare and costly works of reference have been re-issued in cheap editions. So you will have no excuse for not being well up in your subject. In fact, you may be so well up that you are discouraged by the very vastness of the field and the impossibility of competing with the wealthy and influential. In this case, do the other thing. Instead of trying to buy many and various examples, buy just one—but a really superb one. Like the man with his Renoir.

The Chinese, who had founded an empire and reached a high state of civilization when we were still living in caves, always held the contemplation of beauty to be as essential to man as the food he eats. In support of which there has come down to us from one of their sages the oft-quoted saying, "If you have two loaves, sell one and buy a lily."

Generally speaking, I suppose I am not a collector in the true sense. My taste is eclectic and embraces a wide variety of interests. But at least, in preferring the old to the new, it cannot be said that I am inconsistent. I have a twenty-year-old car, a thirty-year-old motor mower and my home itself is one of the oldest cottages around here, dating from early Georgian times. On the domestic side, my wife's treadle sewing machine belonged to her grandmother and was made sometime in the 1890's. Before the move down from London we decided to have it overhauled by the local service agent. I shall never forget how this young man, who had never seen a model of such an early date, fondled the shining metal parts and said, "They don't

put stuff like this in them nowadays." He spent a long time examining the machine, for his own pleasure apparently, for he could find nothing wrong with it except that it needed a new shuttle and a drop of oil here and there. (Even the need for a new shuttle was due to no fault of the old one ; it was simply that my wife had dropped and trodden on it and caused a bad dent in a delicate part.)

We had until fairly recently what must have been one of the oldest vacuum cleaners extant. And again, when this was over-hauled by a young man from the local agency, there were gasps of amazement. Yet it functioned perfectly and all the servicing agent could do was to sell us a new set of brushes.

The point is that all these things were hand-made, not rolled off a conveyor-belt at the end of an assembly line. The materials put into them, apart from the skill and integrity of the craftsmen, are not used today. They have been supplanted by synthetics and plastics, cheap alloys and substitutes, which were not made to last, and which amply fulfil the manufacturer's intention. I would not change my old car even if I could afford to buy a new one. It has a Mulliner body which has been well cared for and the leather, the carpeting, the polished walnut and expensive chromium are in as good condition today as when they were put in. I am no speed fiend and I do not care a jot that modern streamlined jobs flash past me doing eighty miles an hour—frequently round blind bends—so long as I can maintain a steady forty, uphill and down, at no effort at all and with an almost inaudible engine. In tight spots I am comforted by the thought that any car banging into mine is likely to come off second best. The metal in mine is of a vastly different quality. Its solid steel bumpers would repel an impact that buckled theirs like a tin tray.

Derisive remarks have been made from time to time about my ancient motor mower, which I bought not long ago for £15. " My dear chap, why not have a new one ? " I don't want a new one. I have a machine so well made, and of such superb material, that it will still be in good shape when I am not. It cuts my half-acre of grass on a pint of gasoline and has not given me a moment's trouble. Over and above its deep, steady purr I can sometimes hear the stuttering racket of a two-year-old machine belonging to my neighbor, which sounds as if it is about to drop to pieces already, though it cost nearly four times

as much. I would not carry the contention to absurdity and maintain that an airplane made in 1914 is a better engineering product than those which go zooming through the sound barrier today. But then, I don't like airplanes anyway.

And, of course, I do believe in having the most up-to-date radio set it is possible to get, with selective tuning that enables us to pick up glorious music from all over the globe and gives us moderns such pleasure as our ancestors never dreamed of. But in the main the sort of appliances *I* handle are, like furniture and porcelain, all the better for a bit of age.

Don't despise the old mowers, old bicycles, old sewing machines and old typewriters that very often go for next to nothing in auction sales. Put into service again, as they mostly can be, they will serve you as well, or better, than new models at fancy prices. Especially typewriters. My wife's little portable was second-hand when she bought it twenty years ago and is still going strong, five books, several plays and countless short stories later.

Talking of sales—Wilkins is sitting on the local paper but on the visible part of the front page, beside his left hind foot, I can see the announcement of a sale at Blandford which will settle my day's program for tomorrow.

Wish me good hunting !











